

FRANK WILLIAMS

—— 1942-2021 ——

Tributes to a remarkable F1 pioneer



‘Frank’s commitment and enthusiasm was infectious to all who worked at Williams’

PATRICK HEAD

‘An icon of the sport and a man who defied all odds’

DAVID COULTHARD

‘He was more than a boss, he was a mentor and a friend to everybody at Williams’

GEORGE RUSSELL



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Frank Williams is gone but his motorsport legacy will endure

For any motorsport fan of the 1980s and 1990s, Williams is one of the big names of Formula 1. Even though success has been hard to come by in recent times, the name carries a resonance, one representing a fiercely competitive and independent spirit.

Much of that came from Sir Frank Williams, and the tributes from many since the great team founder's passing was announced last weekend demonstrate how much he was admired and respected, not just in the United Kingdom but around the motorsport world.

As Adam Cooper shows in our tribute on page 4, Williams had to work hard – more than once – to gain a real foothold in F1. He finally hit gold when he persuaded Patrick Head (p8) and Alan Jones to join him, triggering more than two decades of success.

There were times in recent years when the team's staunch independence worked against it as big manufacturer deals – which might have taken it to the next level – went begging, but it's hard not to admire the determination, resilience and passion Frank Williams had.

And, even while Williams continues its current revival, the team still stands tall in F1's history books. In terms of world championship wins it's fourth, behind only Ferrari, McLaren and Mercedes. When it comes to constructors' crowns, it's second to Ferrari. That's quite a legacy for a 'failed' single-seater racer and salesman...



Kevin Turner

Kevin Turner
Chief Editor

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its climax



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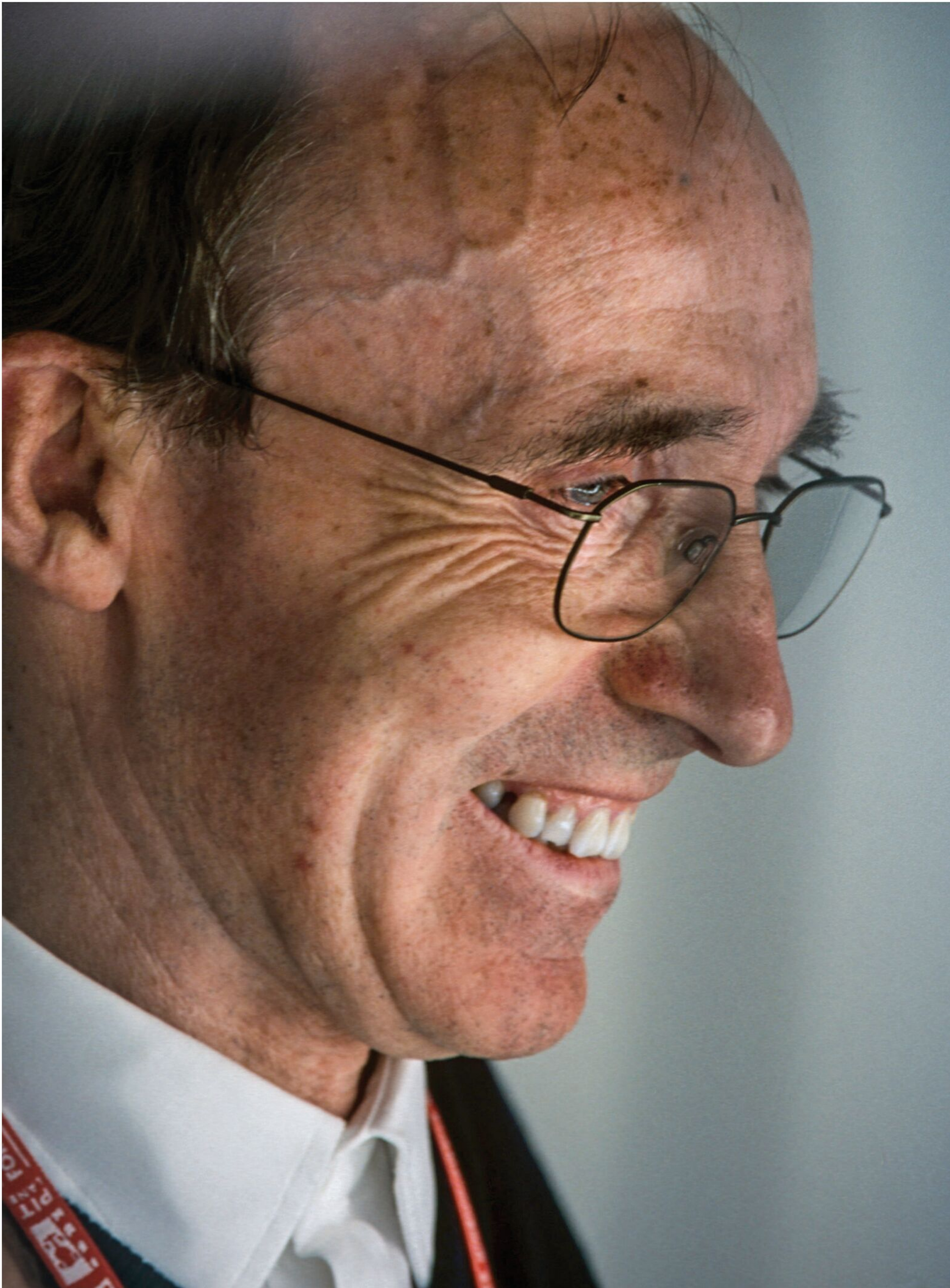

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Sir Frank Williams

— 1942-2021 —

ADAM COOPER

PHOTOGRAPHY  **motorsport**
IMAGES

The outpouring of affection for Sir Frank Williams following last Sunday's announcement of his death was a clear indication of the respect in which he was held around the world. Former Williams drivers and people from all areas of motorsport united in expressing their admiration for a man who had achieved so much success, and yet remained at heart the ultimate enthusiast, always eager to see the next race or support the latest young star coming through the ranks.

He also served as an inspiration to many by overcoming the dreadful road accident he suffered over 35 years ago to live a rich and fulfilling life against the odds.

Francis Owen Garbett Williams was born in South Shields on 16 April 1942. His father was an RAF bomber pilot who left when he was a baby, and his mother subsequently devoted her attention to Frank's upbringing. He was educated at a strict Catholic boarding school in Scotland, where he first developed a passion for cars and racing. He hitchhiked to circuits all over the UK, and on leaving school he undertook a series of jobs to raise cash for his first racing activities with a humble Austin A35 in 1962.

At a Mallory Park club meeting he crashed and, clambering onto the grass bank, he met the unrelated Jonathan Williams, who had gone off a few laps earlier. The two got talking, and Frank would soon be absorbed into a circle of racing friends that included Piers Courage, Sheridan Thynne, Bubbles Horsley and Charlie Crichton-Stuart.

In 1963, Jonathan Williams moved up to Formula Junior and, by now out of money, Frank joined him on a European tour as mechanic and companion. "There was a lot to see," he recalled. "It was fun, always very enjoyable. It was a little bit hand-to-mouth financially, and we really did sleep in between the wheelbase of the car, either side, in Jonathan's VW pickup."

Frank acquired an old Brabham and in 1964 he tried to launch his own single-seater career in the new Formula 3 category. He paid his way by buying and selling racing cars, engines and parts. He competed whenever he could, travelling to continental races with his tight-knit group of friends.

He was one of many lodgers at an infamous west London flat where he was known to do anything to raise a buck, from selling tickets to slightly dodgy movie shows to streaking around the garden for a £5 bet. Frank proved to be a good salesman, and his wheeling and dealing gradually took over from driving. Then, at the end of 1967, he made his debut as an entrant, running Courage in an F3 race at Brands Hatch.

At that stage he was still trying to source the funding with which to resume his own racing career, but over the winter he made the momentous decision to focus on team ownership. In 1968 he ran an F2 Brabham for Courage under the Frank Williams Racing Cars banner from his small workshop in Slough. He showed a knack for delegating, hiring ace Kiwi mechanic John Muller — an ex-McLaren man — to prepare the dark blue car to a high standard.

After a solid F2 season with Courage in 1968, Williams decided to move straight into grand prix racing the following year, buying an ex-works Brabham BT26. For a while he had former McLaren designer Robin Herd as his engineer, before the Englishman headed off to form March with Max Mosley.

In that first season Courage scored stunning second places in Monaco and at Watkins Glen, and battled for the lead at Monza. Even for 1969 it was an impressive debut effort for a private team with a year-old car.

It set Williams on his way, and for 1970 he did a deal with Alejandro de Tomaso to run Courage in a brand-new chassis built by the Modena-based sportscar maker. The car was free, but Williams had to find the budget to run it, and he had little real support from Italy, other than the technical skills of designer Gian Paolo Dallara. Nicknamed the 'Tomato', the red car proved unwieldy at first, and it was just becoming more competitive when Courage was killed at Zandvoort. The devastated Frank had lost his driver and his best friend, but he carried on.

At end of the 1970 season de Tomaso canned the F1 project, and Williams was back to square one. He managed to find a budget to run customer March chassis in 1971 and 1972, but he knew that he had to build his own car in order to forge a long-term >>

OBITUARY FRANK WILLIAMS

future, and in late 1972 the first bespoke 'Williams' appeared, although it was named the Politoys FX3 after the Italian model car company that provided vital funding.

For 1973 Williams again signed a deal with an Italian sportscar manufacturer, this time Iso. He also managed to attract support from Philip Morris, leading him to name his cars Iso-Marlboros. Over the next couple of years a multitude of drivers came and went, but only rarely did the team score points, and funding was always tight. When the phone was cut off he operated from a nearby public call box.

His greatest supporter was wife Virginia. They met in 1967 and were married in 1974, and 'Ginny' had to make great sacrifices over the years as she brought up their three children while Frank inevitably focused his attention, and their money, on the business.

It was in 1974 that the 'FW' initials appeared in the Iso's name for the first time, but it was only in 1975 that the cars were officially given the Williams identity. It was another tough year, and yet somehow Jacques Laffite earned a surprise second in Germany with the FW04.

At the end of the year Frank hired a young ex-Lola engineer named Patrick Head, sowing the seeds of the partnership that would forge motorsport history. But by now Williams had huge debts, so he began looking for an investor. After seven years of endless financial struggle, he teamed up with wealthy Canadian oil entrepreneur Walter Wolf.

Wolf paid for some of Williams's engines in 1975, and had subsequently acquired the cars and assets of the defunct Hesketh team. The ex-James Hunt 308C was rebadged as the Wolf-Williams FW05 for 1976, while Jacky Ickx was hired to drive. Harvey Postlethwaite came with the chassis as chief engineer, and Head stayed on to become his number two. It was a disastrous season, and the reworked second-hand cars were not competitive. At the end of 1976 Wolf brought in ex-Lotus man Peter Warr as team manager. Williams, used to running his own show, was moved sideways to a position of sponsorship finder and general odd-job man.

When the renamed Wolf team took its new WR1 to Argentina in January 1977, Williams was not present. Jody Scheckter duly won the race, and Frank was heartbroken at no longer being his own boss, at the centre of the action. He decided to quit and start all over again.

He had nothing, having lost his hard-won Formula One Constructors' Association membership in the Wolf deal, and had to create a new company, which he called Williams Grand Prix Engineering. Belgian driver Patrick Neve brought sponsorship, while Frank found a modest sum from Saudia Airlines. The cash enabled him to buy a second-hand March and a stock



Williams ran F1 cars for the talented Courage before tragedy struck

of Cosworth engines, while a former carpet warehouse in Didcot, Oxfordshire was found as a base.

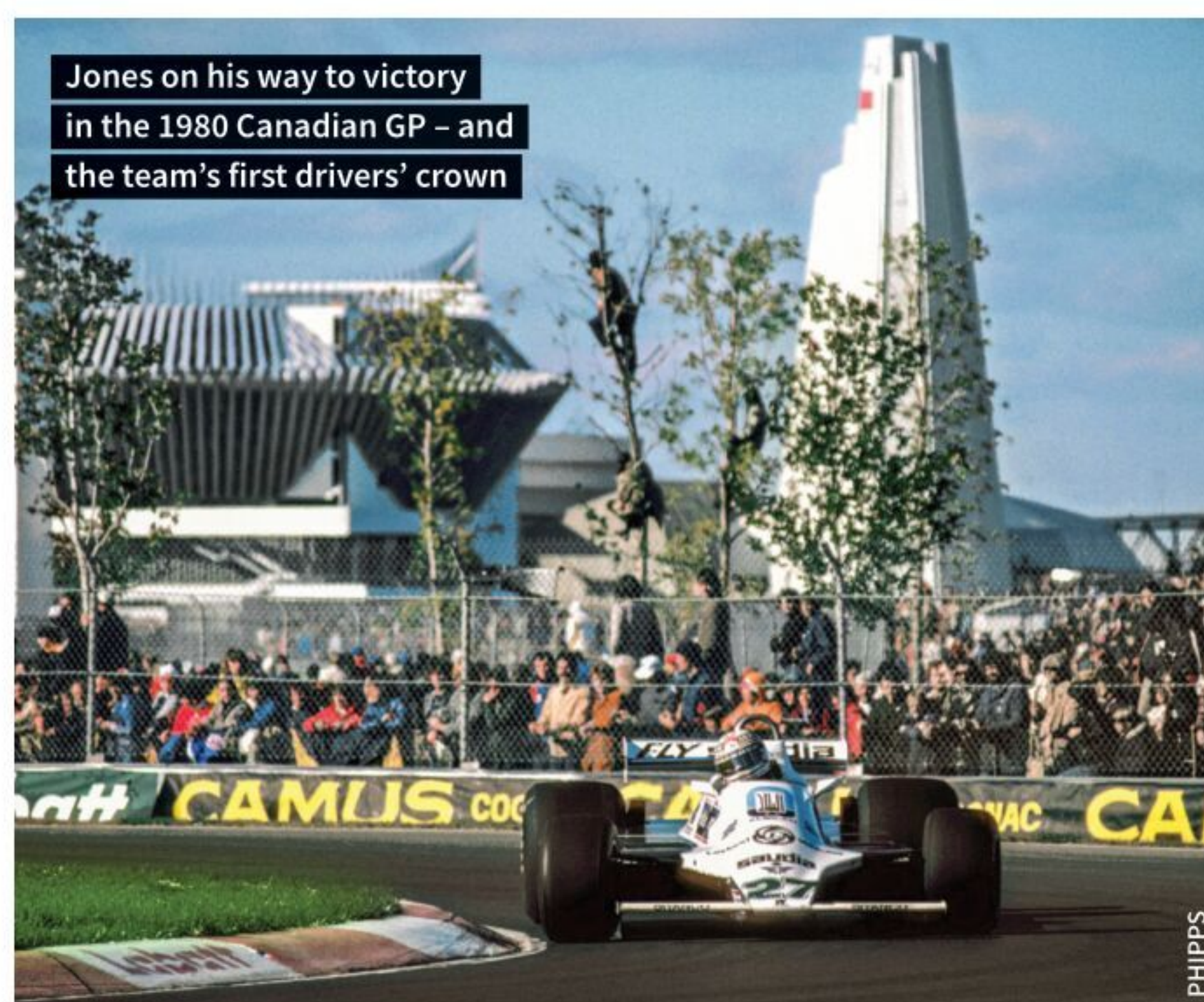
Williams also had an ace up his sleeve. Head had initially stayed with the Wolf team, but the ever-persuasive Frank convinced him to join his start-up operation, offering him the challenge of designing a new car from scratch for the following season. "I'd got nowhere on my own the first time round," Williams would recall. "But I was given the opportunity to start again, and I took it. I think 1969 can't be forgotten and played its part, but the main thing was 1977. It was very difficult, but it was fun, it was worthwhile, and we were convinced that we'd get there."

The mediocre March was just a stopgap. In the background Head and his colleagues, now including young engineer Neil Oatley and mechanic/fabricator Ross Brawn, had been working quietly away on what became the Williams FW06.

Frank put a £350,000 budget together and persuaded Alan Jones,



Laffite took a surprise second in 1975 German GP with the mediocre FW04



“His sheer determination and supreme level of fitness allowed him to pull through”

winner of the 1977 Austrian GP with Shadow, to come on board for 1978. The no-nonsense Australian gelled perfectly with Head and Williams, and he was to play a key role in establishing the team. “He was a great guy,” Williams recalled. “We were at the right age, and we enjoyed each other’s attitude to life at that stage. On the track he was a swashbuckling racer – he gave no quarter, and he expected none. He really hung it out. He never had an off day.”

The new FW06 proved to be competitive, at least with other non-ground-effect machines. Head observed the successful Lotus 79, and for 1979 he tried to take the ground-effect concept to the next step with the FW07. Meanwhile, Frank continued to find extra funding, helped by old F3 pal Crichton-Stuart. It allowed him to hire Clay Regazzoni and expand to two cars.

It took a while to fully exploit the FW07’s aero package, but the car became the pacesetter and, after Jones retired, Regazzoni scored a memorable first win for the team in the British GP. Jones would go on to win four races that year. Williams was on its way, propelled by the combination of Head’s technical leadership and Frank’s sheer determination to succeed.

For 1980 Carlos Reutemann replaced Regazzoni, and Williams became firmly established as a frontrunner, with Jones beating Brabham’s Nelson Piquet to the team’s first titles. Williams took the constructors’ crown again in 1981 and Reutemann could have won another drivers’ title, but he lost out to Piquet at the finale.

Jones retired at the end of that season, and was replaced by Keke Rosberg. After Reutemann unexpectedly walked away early in 1982, the Finn went on to earn the team’s second drivers’ title, despite winning only one race with the FW08.

By now the turbo cars were dominating, and Frank knew that

the days of the trusty Cosworth were numbered. He pulled off a coup when he concluded a deal to run the new Honda V6. It appeared in the back of a Williams for the first time at the end of 1983. Alas, the Honda proved unreliable and uncompetitive in 1984, although Rosberg did at least manage to win the Dallas GP. Williams and Head made it clear to Honda’s management that the company had to step up its game, and the 1985 version was a vast improvement. Rosberg and new recruit Nigel Mansell became increasingly competitive as the season went on, and between them they won the last three races.

With momentum building and Piquet replacing the McLaren-bound Rosberg, the Williams team looked set for a great season in 1986. But everything changed in March when Frank was involved in a road accident on the way to the airport after a Paul Ricard test. He suffered a broken neck, and came close to death. His sheer determination and supreme level of fitness – he had always been a keen runner – allowed him to pull through. But life would never be the same again, and a man who always had such boundless energy would thereafter be confined to a wheelchair.

As Williams began his rehabilitation, Head took the reins. Frank watched from afar as Piquet and Mansell dominated the 1986 season, only for Alain Prost to steal the title in Adelaide. By 1987, Frank was able to return to a frontline role. If anything his new situation allowed him to focus even more keenly than before on running the team.

That year Piquet earned the team’s third drivers’ title with the FW11B, which also scored Williams’s fourth constructors’ championship. But the relationship with Honda came to an end – essentially because Frank did not want to be dictated to on driver choice. Williams then endured a difficult year with customer >>





Frank returned after his accident during the Mansell-Piquet rivalry

Judd engines in 1988. As ever, though, Frank was building for the future, concluding a deal with Renault to run a new V10 for the start of the normally aspirated era in 1989.

A new period of Williams domination was on the way, but it took two more pieces to fall into place — the arrival of Adrian Newey as chief designer in 1990, and the return of Mansell the following season after a two-year spell at Ferrari. Newey's FW14 challenged McLaren's supremacy in 1991, and in 1992 Mansell was utterly dominant with the technically advanced FW14B.

By now everyone wanted to drive for Williams. Frank hired Alain Prost for 1993, and amid much acrimony Mansell departed to the United States. Not for the last time, the team boss found

“When Senna was killed at Imola, it was a crushing blow to Frank and the team”

himself at the heart of a driver-choice controversy.

“There are more stories to be recounted about Nigel Mansell within Williams than anyone else,” Frank recalled. “He was just one hell of a racer. Whenever he went racing the horns came out and the fangs popped out of his jaw — upper and lower — and he was off. He was fantastic, but difficult to deal with sometimes. But there are great memories.”

Prost strolled to the 1993 title before retiring, while new boy Damon Hill proved a quick team-mate, and soon began winning races. For 1994 Ayrton Senna came on board, rekindling a

PATRICK HEAD ON FRANK WILLIAMS

I was working with Ron Tauranac at Trojan Cars part-time while building a boat in the Surrey Docks when I received a call to meet Frank at his works at Reading. I knew nothing of Formula 1, or of Frank Williams, but was completely broke and was happy to take his offer to join the long line of designers he'd had working for him.

One week after I started, the deal with Walter Wolf was done and with that came Harvey Postlethwaite and the Hesketh cars. I was offered £500 to leave or to stay and work under Harvey. This was a great learning year for me, and I had the opportunity to observe without being in the direct firing line.

At the beginning of 1977 Frank departed. I was with Jody Scheckter and a small test team at Kyalami in South Africa and received a call from Frank saying that he was starting again, and would I join him? It was a big step for me, but Frank's total enthusiasm and commitment was infectious, and I decided to depart with him. This was the start of Williams Grand Prix Engineering in March 1977.

Frank operated very much on the business and operational side, and myself on the design and manufacturing side, and we generally did not interfere in each other's 'patch'. In the early years we had some serious fiscal challenges, requiring hiding from the bank manager.



There were times when I found the challenges overpowering, but Frank was always positive, always convinced that 'everything will work out, chap', and it was hard not to be swept along with his positive attitude. Over the years we had few reasons to argue, but I can truthfully say that I never had any reason to doubt his commitment to supporting myself, whatever engineering challenges arose, even sometimes when we took a little time to correct them.

He was very much in admiration of fast drivers, and we won championships with Alan Jones, Keke Rosberg, Nelson Piquet,

Nigel Mansell, Alain Prost, Damon Hill and Jacques Villeneuve, not a slouch among them, but his highest admiration was for Ayrton Senna. I am sure he was devastated when Ayrton was killed in a Williams car, but Frank was very private in his emotions, he never expressed his anguish that Ayrton should die in a Williams car, nor did he show any lack of conviction regarding the company carrying on, winning more races and championships.

Frank was immensely supported by his wife, Ginny, emotionally and practically. Most or all of her payments from her family went towards keeping Williams afloat in the early days, and again, although Frank did not show it, I have no doubt he was devastated when she died much too young at 66 in 2013 of cancer.

Frank's commitment and enthusiasm towards success on the track was infectious, not only to me but to all others who worked at Williams. Right up to the final days of the Williams family running the company, Frank could be seen in the factory and particularly in the 'Race Shop' with the cars and the team mechanics, inspiring his workforce.

Frank had already stepped back from the company and the Williams family sold their interest in mid-2020, but his mark upon F1 is very much made, and he will be warmly remembered by many, including myself.



relationship that had begun when Frank gave the Brazilian his first F1 test in the summer of 1983. After a difficult start to the season Senna was killed on a dark weekend at Imola – it was a crushing blow to Williams and his team.

Bernie Ecclestone brokered a deal for Mansell to return and make guest appearances, but it was Hill who helped pull things together. He came agonisingly close to winning that year's title, losing out after a controversial clash with Michael Schumacher at the Adelaide finale.

After a difficult 1995 season, Hill bounced back to win in 1996, just pipping his rookie team-mate Jacques Villeneuve. But Frank had already decided to replace the Englishman with Heinz-Harald Frentzen, again sparking controversy. Newey also left towards the end of the 1996 season, joining rival McLaren, and his loss would be felt in the years to come.

In 1997 it was Villeneuve's turn to win, the Canadian surviving controversial contact with Schumacher at Jerez to claim the team's seventh drivers' championship. No one could imagine at the time that it would also be the last to date.

Renault stopped its works involvement at the end of that season. As with Honda's departure, Frank had already found a solution, agreeing a deal with BMW, although the new relationship would not start until 2000. In the interim the team endured two largely fruitless seasons with customer Renault engines. On the plus side Williams's earlier successes earned him a knighthood in 1999, while that year BMW won Le Mans with the Williams-built V12 LMR.

At the start of the first BMW F1 season in 2000, Frank again made news with his driver choice – this time in a positive way by plumping for F3 graduate Jenson Button as team-mate to Ralf Schumacher, although the seat was only available for a year before Juan Pablo Montoya arrived.

The team won four races in 2001, but only one in 2002, as the Schumacher/Ferrari/Bridgestone package proved dominant. But the FW25 of 2003 was very competitive and for a while the title appeared to be within Montoya's reach, only for the team's challenge to fade in the latter part of the season. The relationship with BMW was strained, with Frank refusing to sell a shareholding or give up his independence, and the German manufacturer left after 2005 to pursue a new association with Sauber.

That loss signalled a dip in fortunes for the team. Over the next few years it flitted from Cosworth to Toyota to Cosworth to Renault engines, always on a customer basis. With unfortunate timing the team fell as low as ninth in the 2011 World Championship, the year that the company went public as Williams Grand Prix Holdings.

The team then somehow scored a freak win in Spain with Pastor Maldonado and the FW34 in 2012, its first since 2004, and the most recent to date. That year Head left his frontline role with the team, and much more was to change in 2013.

In March, Williams's wife Ginny, his rock and greatest supporter, passed away. Shortly afterwards it was announced that his daughter Claire would be promoted from the commercial department to the deputy team principal job, while ex-Jaguar man Mike O'Driscoll became group CEO, a further sign that the days of Frank as a one-man band running the show were over.

For the start of the hybrid era in 2014, Williams agreed a deal with Mercedes, and it proved to be an inspired choice. The team was able to take advantage of the Brixworth power unit's initial superiority to become a serious contender once more, with the cars looking good too in Martini livery. Felipe Massa and Valtteri Bottas took a string of podiums, and the team earned third in the championship in 2014 and 2015, before slipping to fifth in 2016 and 2017 as rivals improved.

Then in 2018 Williams tumbled to the bottom of the table. Prize money was thus drastically reduced and, with insufficient sponsorship coming in, the team found itself in a spiral of debt and struggling to improve an uncompetitive car. With budgets rising and teams increasingly owned by manufacturers or corporations, it was becoming ever harder for Frank to survive as an independent. In August 2020, Frank and Claire finally accepted the inevitable, and the team was sold to Dorilton, signalling the end of the family's involvement after 43 years. Fully respecting the team's heritage, the new owners agreed to retain the Williams name.

The team still lies fourth on the all-time F1 wins list with 114 world championship GP victories, having also earned seven drivers' championships and nine constructors' titles. It's a remarkable legacy. 🏆





Happy days with Hill at his signing for the 1993 season

Tributes

PHOTOGRAPHY  **motorsport**
IMAGES

Damon Hill

He had us fooled on a number of occasions. But woe betide the man who underestimated Sir Frank. Determination and tenacity personified. He has earned his eternal rest 100 times over.

Valtteri Bottas

Thank you for everything Frank. You will be missed. Rest in peace.

George Russell

Today, we say goodbye to the man who defined our team. Sir Frank was such a genuinely wonderful human being and

I'll always remember the laughs we shared. He was more than a boss, he was a mentor and a friend to everybody who joined the Williams Racing family and so many others.

Nigel Mansell

Very sad news to hear of Sir Frank's passing, he had an incredible life fulfilling so many dreams. What a fantastic team and family, we send our heartfelt condolences. RIP.

Lewis Hamilton

Sir Frank Williams was one of the kindest people I had the pleasure

of meeting in this sport. What he achieved is something truly special. Until his last days I know he remained a racer and a fighter at heart. His legacy will live on forever.

Nico Rosberg

Rest in peace, Sir Frank Williams. I owe so much to you and your family. I am forever thankful and my thoughts are with you, Jonathan and Claire, and everyone else in your family. I will never forget the moment when I was standing next to you in the Monza F1 garage in 2005 watching the Formula 1 race and you turned to me and you said that you have decided that you want me to race for you in 2006...

Dickie Stanford

RIP. Frank Williams my mentor and friend. His love for his team is what pushed him to the top of F1. I am going to miss you.

Jackie Stewart to Sky Sports

His passing is perhaps a kindness for Frank. He's fought it very hard and of course we will miss him always. He was a great man for British motorsport, created in great style and always doing the right thing. Frank Williams was just a great gentleman. He was an example



With Mansell at Monza, 1991 Italian Grand Prix

COLOMBO



Goodwood gathering with
Coulthard, Stewart and
1980 world champ Jones

to me when I started, with my son Paul, Stewart Grand Prix. I never thought that I could ever reach the height that Frank and Ron Dennis could. We felt that they were the kings of the castle. He was a great competitor, very focused, completely committed to his sport.

David Coulthard

An icon of the sport and a man who defied all odds in front of him. We will miss you Frank & the whole sport will remember all of your achievements.

Martin Brundle

Sir Frank was a remarkable man, fiercely determined and competitive, tirelessly overcoming any number of very significant challenges, a pure racer to the end. And proudly British. Along with Stirling and Murray we've lost too many titans of motorsport recently. Rest in peace.

Jenson Button

We lost a great man today, Sir Frank Williams the man that gave me and many others an opportunity to prove ourselves in F1. Frank lived and breathed the sport we love and his achievements speak for themselves. I'll miss our little chats in random hotel lobbies around the world while Frank

was out getting some exercise but most of all I'll miss his smile, that infectious smile. My condolences to the Williams family. Rest in peace boss.

Alan Jones

Apart from being a boss he was a friend. He epitomised the spirit and the determination of the ultimate enthusiast. We had a wonderful working relationship got on really well. He was a hard taskmaster but he was 100% fair and I often say that he was the best guy I ever drove for.

Juan Pablo Montoya

His passing is very sad, but he lived a great life. He was amazing. He was the guy that always wanted to know what's going on, always wanted to be part of the conversation. I always used to joke around with him. He used to exercise a lot for example, and I used to walk behind him and make him work out harder, and at the beginning he'd really struggle! We always had a good laugh.

Mario Andretti

Each time I was with Frank Williams, I felt I was touching greatness. His mere presence changed the aura of a room... wow, Frank Williams is here. His life story of perseverance will live

on as a testament to the power of self-belief & hard work. My condolences to his family.

Jason Plato

Incredibly sad news, Sir Frank believed in me when my chips were down and gave me my big break. A truly wonderful man. Sleep well my friend. Deepest condolences to Claire, Jonathan, Jamie and all his many friends.

Nico Hulkenberg

Rest in peace, Sir Frank Williams! His legacy will be forever part of F1 and I will never forget the moment in 2009 when this man opened the door to F1 for me.

Alex Wurz

Dear Sir Frank, please rest in peace! It was a privilege to race for Williams! You've been a tough but great boss, I treasure every millisecond I spent with you! The motorsport world, your friends & family will miss you, my condolences to all! Your legacy lives on forever.

Derek Daly

Woke to very sad news. A man who proved that pushing for what might be possible was a recipe for success. He left a great legacy. RIP my friend.

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A racer in the purest sense

The Sky pundit and friend of the Williams family recalls an old-school team owner who succeeded through sheer tenacity and whose love of motorsport was boundless

KARUN CHANDHOK

The first Formula 1 race I ever watched was the 1987 British Grand Prix. We all know the story – Mansell stops to change tyres, chases Piquet down, and then dramatically passes him for the win, kicking off an incredible crowd invasion.

That race made me an F1 fan, but it also made me a Williams fan. Sure, I was only three at the time, but in the next couple of years I started to recognise the names Frank Williams and Ron Dennis in the Autosport magazines that would arrive at our home in India. The concept of a man in a wheelchair being able to run a team that was winning all these races just seemed incredible to me. It planted this seed in my head that human beings can do anything if their mind and will is strong enough.

Fast-forward to 2002 and a mutual friend of ours, Iain Cunningham, who worked at Williams through the late 1980s and early 1990s, asked if I would like to go to Grove and meet Frank. Complete with blazer borrowed from my dad, I nervously shuffled into Frank's office as he sat there with his headset on, talking away on the phone. I quickly realised in that first conversation that Frank loved talking about motor racing more than anything on the planet. That obviously was perfect for an F1 super-geek like me! We sat there for nearly an hour chatting about my Formula 3 season, their current battle against Ferrari, and Formula 1 on the whole.

This love for the sport never waned even in his later years.

“I always thought he'd make a hopeless poker player, because he couldn't hide his expressions”

I remember several occasions where I had the opportunity to just chat with Frank about racing, and I always thought he would make a hopeless poker player, because he couldn't hide his expressions. His face would light up whenever we talked about Alan Jones, Keke Rosberg, Nigel Mansell or Juan Pablo Montoya. I remember chatting with him after driving the 1992 title-winning FW14B at Silverstone, and he was beaming with pride when he described the domination of that season.

Frank's love and passion for the sport were surpassed only by his tenacity. Bernie Ecclestone tells a great story of Frank coming to borrow a few hundred quid just to get to the next race. “He always paid me back,” said Bernie. “But as he was paying me back, he'd ask if he could borrow a couple of grand.” Frank was a grafter who slept on people's couches, ran a business from a phone box and charmed

his way into sponsorship deals that ultimately built the team up into a world championship winner.

Like anyone who's had life-altering injuries, Frank's life can really be divided into two halves: pre and post the 1986 car crash. One of the constants across both halves, however, was his wife Virginia, who supported him in the late 1970s when he was scrambling to get money together, and then kept him alive even when the doctors often gave up in 1986. Anyone who has read Virginia's book *A Different Kind of Life* will know what a mountain they had to climb as a family just for him to stay alive, let alone get back to work after his accident.

Over the years, I've become very close friends with their son Jonathan and also got to know Ginny and their other children Claire and Jamie. Going to watch races with Ginny brought home how much this was very much a family business where they were all invested in the story. “Be quiet boys, they're talking about our cars,” she would shush Jonny and me as if we were a pair of children.

In 2019 Jonathan worked with the RofGO collection on the restoration of Frank's first Formula 1 car, the Brabham BT26 that Piers Courage drove to second place in the Monaco Grand Prix in 1969. We kept it as a surprise for Frank, and arranged a day at Silverstone where his entire family including the grandchildren came to watch the car run. The smile that came across his face when he saw the car was like a five-year-old on Christmas morning after Santa's popped in. The pride in having his whole family there to watch the moment made a cold, wet Silverstone feel like the Bahamas. The passion and love for motor racing never waned.

Alongside the likes of Enzo Ferrari, Colin Chapman, Ron Dennis and Ken Tyrrell, Frank was one of the old-school team owners who lived their lives for their race teams. It was thanks to people of their generation who worked alongside (and sometimes against) Ecclestone that the sport is what it is today. But unlike Chapman or Dennis, who had ambitions of empires outside of F1, Frank's goals always revolved around motor racing. He was a racer in the purest sense with no distractions to derail that focus.

But he was also very quick to admit that he didn't really know how to make quick race cars. I heard numerous stories of how brilliant Patrick Head or Adrian Newey were. He understood that without Patrick he couldn't achieve the success he so badly wanted, and by extension understood that you need to make a team where engineers want to work. Just talk to people like Jock Clear, James Robinson or Geoff Willis and they will all tell you what a good place Williams was for an engineer to develop their F1 career.

Frank's passing last weekend brought to a close another chapter in the storybook of F1. The race victories and world championships are what the public will know. But it's the inspirational, charming leader with the mischievous grin that the world will miss. ❧

Masi defends lengthy steward verdict delays

FORMULA 1

Formula 1 race director Michael Masi has defended the amount of time it can take for stewards to announce decisions on race weekends after criticism from fans.

The past two race weekends have featured long delays for stewards' decisions. Lewis Hamilton's exclusion from qualifying in Brazil was only announced hours before the sprint race began, while a 21-hour wait followed in Qatar over three yellow-flag offences in qualifying.

But Masi insisted that there were no problems with the lengthy waits given the request in the past for detail on the decisions. "All of you have always asked for more description in decisions rather than just saying this person is guilty or this person is

not guilty," he said. "You actually want as much of an understanding as possible of the process that was gone through. Sometimes I think the stewards would be happy to write just, 'This person has breached the rules' and end of story, but then we will go back a few years and all of you said you want more description."

Max Verstappen, Valtteri Bottas and Carlos Sainz Jr were summoned by the stewards for allegedly not respecting yellow flags in Qatar qualifying. Verstappen and Bottas were hit with grid penalties, while Sainz was cleared of any wrongdoing.

Instead of holding the hearings on Saturday evening after qualifying, the stewards did not meet with the drivers until Sunday afternoon. An administrative error then led to the wrong grid being



SUTTON
motorsport
IMAGES

issued, forcing Sainz's and Bottas's crews to swap places while setting up on the grid.

Masi said the Qatar hearings were scheduled for Sunday afternoon because drivers were not at the track on Saturday evening. "It was obviously relatively late, them not being here, long day, etc,

so do it in the morning, everyone's fresh," he said. "You've also got to think of offset timeframes and everything else that you haven't taken into account in the timeframe, when people are available, when people get here, and curfews."

ADAM COOPER & LUKE SMITH

Red Bull continues Merc wing sabre-rattling

FORMULA 1

Red Bull believes that Formula 1 title rival Mercedes no longer has an "abnormal" straightline speed advantage, amid ongoing intrigue over flexible rear wings as the crucial final two rounds of 2021 loom.

Red Bull suspects that Mercedes has been running a flexible rear wing to boost its top speed, and has based its suspicion on photos that it believes shows score

marks on the inside of endplates. Mercedes insists that it is doing nothing wrong, and team boss Toto Wolff said the photos that have been circulating do not show score marks, claiming Red Bull is seeing a "ghost".

The FIA began a fact-finding mission at the recent Qatar Grand Prix to check on the flexibility of the rear-wing main planes and see if any tougher tests need to be brought in. Even though there has been no change to the rules and the Mercedes wings have fully

passed all the tests and FIA inspections, Red Bull believes that something has changed.

"I think what we have seen in recent races is an abnormal straightline speed," said Red Bull F1 boss Christian Horner. "Toto has been at pains to point out that there have been gains in straightline speed when nothing has changed, but it's encouraging that this is the first race since prior to Silverstone we've been able to match their straightline speed and an exponential increase in races."

Although the FIA tests conducted in Qatar and over the remainder of the season will not hold any regulatory value, Horner believes that simple monitoring of the situation is a positive. "I'm glad to see it's being well policed," he said. "I'm confident that the tests that have been introduced should eradicate any ability to circumnavigate."

Responding to Red Bull's comments, Wolff said he was "happy that they are happy", but was uncertain that it would curb the possibility of a protest. "Let's go to Saudi Arabia [this weekend] and maybe we'll hear some comments again," he said. "We're struggling to keep up with commenting on the rumours being made from that side."

JONATHAN NOBLE



Oh look – it's not
flexing anymore.
Merics in Qatar

COATES/MOTORSPORT IMAGES



MAUGER/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

Reid outlines Sulayem quest

FIA

Former World Rally Championship-winning co-driver Robert Reid has spoken ahead of this month's FIA presidential election of his desire to double the number of participants in motorsport.

Reid, who co-drove the late Richard Burns to the 2001 WRC title, is part of the team behind the presidential bid of former rally driver Mohammed ben Sulayem on 17 December. The Scot is on ben Sulayem's ticket as deputy president for motorsport. The Emirati is in a two-horse race against current FIA deputy president for sport Graham Stoker to replace Jean Todt.

Talking on the latest of Autosport's series of #ThinkingForward podcasts, Reid said: "When you look at the barriers, cost is the one that comes up more than most, and we need to work as much as we can to bring the costs down. We have a campaign initiative to 'double motorsport' in the four-year term, which might seem to be particularly ambitious, but I think particularly in the developing world is a huge opportunity.

"This is only going to happen with low costs, particularly entry-level motorsport. If we can produce CAD drawings for a low-cost kart or Crosscar, then the clubs in the regions can start local production, that then has a spin-off effect of creating an infrastructure that sparks interest from not just drivers, but mechanics and engineers. Also, low-cost vehicles potentially create a revenue for clubs with arrive-and-drive participation."

Reid also spoke of ben Sulayem's plan to create a CEO role. "I would say the majority of people have really liked the idea," he added. "Some have questioned it, and for us it's really simple. I think Mohammed will be a different type of president than perhaps we're used to. He will be pretty much non-executive in the way he is president. He certainly won't micromanage."



Listen to James Allen talk with Robert Reid as part of our #ThinkingForward podcast series



Enigmatic images reveal delta-wing Gen3 concept

FORMULA E

Formula E and the FIA have released teaser images of the all-important Gen3 car, which promises a delta wing-inspired design and is theoretically capable of 200mph.

The success of the car, due to race from 2023, is critical to the survival of Formula E as interest from manufacturers continues to wane. Indeed, marque executives and team principals were shown the full design in secret on the first day of pre-season testing at Valencia this week.

The images released for public consumption preview a look inspired by the "aero-efficient delta wing of a fighter jet". That, like the X-wing Gen2 machine, will ensure the Spark Racing Technology-built car retains a sense of individuality among more conventional single-seaters. The robust wheel covers will be ditched in favour of a return to open wheels and the massive diffuser appears set to remain, while sizeable tail fins are a notable addition.

The FIA and Formula E have committed to several key technical

aspects, with the Gen3 machine billed as "the world's most efficient racing car". This is on account of drivers being required to recover "at least" 40% of energy via regenerative braking to complete a race – up from the current 30-35% range. This is enabled by a dual-axle set-up (250kW front, 350kW rear) for a total regenerative braking capacity of 600kW, while the total power output stands at 350kW (470bhp). The regenerative braking potential means the rear axle features no hydraulic rear brakes. The theoretical top speed of 200mph is unlikely to come to pass on street circuits.

FIA president Jean Todt said: "The new Gen3 Formula E single-seater is a car created at the intersection of high performance, efficiency and sustainability. I have no doubt that this new single-seater will elevate Formula E to the next level."

Behind-closed-doors testing by Spark is under way for Gen3, and manufacturers are set to take delivery of their machines in the spring of next year.

MATT KEW





Ticktum and Askew join electric field in time for test

FORMULA E

Two-time Macau Grand Prix winner and 2021 FIA Formula 2 title outsider Dan Ticktum will again be able to show his street-circuit prowess as he joins the Formula E grid with backmarker squad NIO 333 for the 2022 season.

The Brit, 22, stated his desire to move to IndyCar, but has now landed in the electric series since his F1 dream seems increasingly difficult to realise after he was dropped by the Williams development programme. That represented the second time he had been booted out by a grand prix squad – he was axed from the Red Bull Junior roster following a brief stint in Super Formula in 2019.

Ticktum, who lies fourth in the F2 standings with Carlin heading into the final two rounds, will now work with new team-mate Oliver Turvey to help rebuild Silverstone-based NIO 333 as it bids to avoid finishing last in the points for the fourth year running.

Ticktum, the 2017 McLaren Autosport BRDC Award winner, took to the track in an FE car for the first time early this week at the Valencia test (above). “It’s going to be quite a big challenge as I have not had long to prepare for the test, and Formula E is complicated, but it’ll be very exciting,” he said.

NIO chief executive Vincent Wang added: “Though he has shouldered some difficulties during his career, I believe that his experience will pave the way to success. He is a young, bright new star who will shine on the Formula E race track.”

Another Formula E newcomer

to lose out on their IndyCar ambitions is Oliver Askew, who joins the freshly independent Andretti Autosport concern as team-mate to 2021 rookie sensation and worthy title protagonist Jake Dennis.

Askew, the 2019 Indy Lights champion, replaces Nissan e.dams recruit Maximilian Guenther and becomes the first American driver in Formula E since Scott Speed contested four rounds for Michael Andretti’s squad in the inaugural 2014-15 season.

Askew did bag a podium in his rookie IndyCar campaign in 2020 driving for Arrow McLaren SP, but he suffered a temporary loss of form due to concussion and was released at the end of the season. He contested five IndyCar races this year.

Off track, there have been further noteworthy shuffles, with Susie Wolff appointed as the chief executive officer of Venturi Racing. She will now be involved in finding a replacement powertrain partner for when Mercedes quits the series at the end of next season. It brings an end to her three-year stint as team principal, with experienced racer Jerome D’Ambrosio taking over the day-to-day running of the team, after joining as deputy team principal last season.

Meanwhile, DS Techeetah co-founder and team principal Mark Preston has been moved upstairs to focus on sourcing funding for the race team. DS Automobiles director Thomas Chevaucher takes on Preston’s old principal role to signify the manufacturer’s greater investment in its Formula E partner squad.

MATT KEW

IndyCar stars in GT enduro

GULF 12 HOURS

McLaren IndyCar drivers Felix Rosenqvist and Pato O’Ward are going to have a bit of fun in the desert early next year. They will be turning out with team boss Zak Brown in one of their employer’s GT cars in the Gulf 12 Hours in Abu Dhabi.

Rosenqvist and O’Ward, who are heading into their second and third seasons respectively with the Arrow McLaren SP squad, will share a McLaren 570S GT4 in the two six-hour GT races that make up the event on 8 January at the Yas Marina circuit with McLaren Racing boss Brown. The fourth driver in the United Autosports-run car will be Le Mans 24 Hours class winner Richard Dean, who co-owns the team with Brown.

The back story to the sportscar outing for the two IndyCar stars is provided by Brown’s desire to get out in one of the GT4 cars this year. Two attempts by the American, a regular in the historic ranks, to race a United 570S were thwarted: he was initially due to drive alongside Dean in the Zandvoort round of the GT4 European Series in June, but had to skip the event to attend a memorial service for McLaren shareholder Mansour Ojeh held at the French Grand Prix at Paul Ricard, and then a rescheduled outing at the Spa round at the end of July had to be canned when he tested positive for COVID.

Rosenqvist suggested that the outing will be handy to “get the rust off a little bit”, adding that if he and O’Ward prove slower than Brown “then we have a new problem”. O’Ward, who will be making his first race appearance in a GT car, said he hoped to “help the boss get some nice silverware to bring home”.

GARY WATKINS



LEVITT/MOTORSPORT IMAGES



Audi star Muller at new P2 team

WEC

A new team based out of Silverstone will join the World Endurance Championship next season, and Audi factory ace Nico Muller will be one of the drivers. Vector Sport has been launched to race in LMP2 next year but appears to have big ambitions for the future.

Vector has been set up by Gary Holland, team manager with the Dragon/Penske Formula E squad over the past three seasons and before at the Jota prototype squad. His fledgling operation ran an ORECA under the Risi Competizione banner at last year's Le Mans 24 Hours and Monza WEC rounds. Holland reckoned it was the right time to launch the new operation, which will field a solo ORECA-Gibson 07 in 2022.

"Thanks to the vision and innovative spirit of the Automobile Club de l'Ouest and the FIA [who run the WEC], endurance racing is on the cusp of an incredibly exciting new era," he said. "Le Mans Hypercar, LMDh and the new GT3 rules [which will replace GTE in 2024] are moving the discipline into the spotlight and what we consider to be the right

direction for the future, and this is why we have decided to launch our new team now."

Muller, twice a runner-up in the DTM with Audi, is the first confirmed driver, though it is understood that the full roster is already in place: the team has said that further announcements, including commercial partnerships, will be announced soon. The Swiss worked alongside Holland in Formula E and moves into the prototype ranks after Audi confirmed him and Rene Rast as the first drivers for its LMDh due to come on stream in 2023.

"Vector Sport may be a new name, but behind it there are quite a few people I know from different racing series who are all very capable," said Muller, whose only previous prototype start came with a one-off for G-Drive Racing at the Shanghai WEC round in 2017. "There's a lot of motivation within the group and excitement about the project. Looking ahead, it's a really great time to be part of the WEC and prototype endurance racing – very exciting and positive – and I'm thankful to Audi Sport for letting me have this opportunity to combine my work with them with this new project."

GARY WATKINS

IN THE HEADLINES

BARCELONA EXTENDS DEAL

Barcelona's Circuit de Catalunya has extended its deal to host the Spanish Grand Prix for five more years, which will take the track's run on the F1 calendar to an unbroken 36-year stint from 1991 to 2026. "As part of the new agreement, improvements to the track and facilities will be made ahead of the race on 22 May 2022, including upgrades and improvements towards the circuit's ambitious sustainability plans," said an F1 statement.

SHWARTZMAN IN HAAS

Formula 2 leading light Robert Shwartzman will take part in the post-season F1 young-driver test at Yas Marina with Haas. The Russian, who is third in the F2 standings, completed the 2020 edition of the test with Ferrari, of which he is a protege.

MERC AERO CHIEF TO ASTON

Aston Martin chief Lawrence Stroll has got his wallet out again. His team has headhunted Mercedes F1 chief aerodynamicist Eric Blandin. He formerly worked at Red Bull with Dan Fallows, who is leaving the Milton Keynes squad to take the Aston technical director role for the start of next season. Blandin is not expected to shuffle from Brackley to Silverstone until next October, by which time you can expect his garden to be looking in tip-top condition...

OLIPHANT PACKS HIS TRUNK

British Touring Car Championship race winner Tom Oliphant is to take a sabbatical from the sport in 2022 to support the career of his fiancée. They are relocating to Sydney in Australia, where her family has business interests. Oliphant plans to return to competition in 2023, and says this could be in Australia, the UK, Europe or North America. Oliphant scored both of his BTCC wins in West Surrey Racing BMWs. The team is understood to be keen to retain four-time champion Colin Turkington and Stephen Jelley for two of its three cars.

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2022 WTCR CALENDAR

RD	VENUE	DATE
1	Most (CZE)	9-10 April
2	Pau (FRA)	7-8 May
3	Nurburgring (DEU)	26-28 May
4	Hungaroring (HUN)	11-12 June
5	Motorland Aragon (ESP)	25-26 June
6	Vila Real (POR)	2-3 July
7	Sochi (RUS)	6-7 August
8	Inje (KOR)	8-9 October
9	Ningbo (CHN)	5-6 November
10	Macau (CHN)	18-20 November

WORLD TOURING CAR CUP

The World Touring Car Cup is planning to take over the headline slot at the Pau Grand Prix in 2022, 13 years after its predecessor, the World Touring Car Championship, last competed at the classic French street track.

The WTCC had a three-year run in Pau from 2007-09, since when the race returned to its single-seater origins. It featured as a Formula 3 European Championship round from 2014-18, and was then fought out by the Euroformula Open field in 2019. The Pau GP was not held in 2020 and 2021 amid the COVID-19 crisis. EFO and event regular the French Formula 4 series have each earmarked a Pau date for 2022, but Autosport

understands that the WTCR will take the coveted GP title at the 7-8 May event.

Pau is just one date on a highly attractive WTCR schedule, which includes a return to the Vila Real street circuit in Portugal and the Macau Guia classic, as well as the continuation of its Nurburgring Nordschleife fixture. Macau is one of three Asian dates that Francois Ribeiro, head of series promoter Discovery Sports Events (parent company of Eurosport), said “will only be possible if travel restrictions and quarantine arrangements allow”.

Ribeiro added: “Being able to include the Grand Prix de Pau weekend within the WTCR framework for the first time is very exciting and provides an opportunity to race

on another iconic street track in a year when we will also make our comeback in Vila Real.”

Hyundai WTCR star Jean-Karl Vernay said: “I’m super-happy to go there. I love the region and Pau is a track I love so I’m definitely happy. Hopefully I will see all the fans I met 10 years ago. I raced there in Formula 3, I won in Formula 4, Formula Renault and Porsche Cup also.”

Lynk & Co’s newly crowned two-time champion Yann Ehrlacher, whose uncle Yvan Muller and mum Cathy have both raced at Pau, remarked: “The last time the WTCC was in Pau I was in school, I was still really young! It’s nice to have a race in France; it’s only happened for me once.”

MARCUS SIMMONS

ORECA to build next Ferrari GT3 contender



Coletta (left) with ORECA chief Hugues de Chaunac

GT3

Ferrari’s new-for-2023 GT3 racer will be built by ORECA. The French motorsport powerhouse has won the tender to assemble the forthcoming design, as well as to provide service support for the car.

ORECA is taking over from Michelotto, which played a key role in the 458 Italia and 488 GT3 contenders since 2011. The Italian company

has also helped develop every GT2/GTE contender since the 348LM of 1994.

Ferrari GT boss Antonello Coletta explained that the marque has “some very ambitious targets” for the next car. “In addition to our engineers’ skill and knowledge, we can count on a first-class partner like ORECA, which has achieved high-profile success in the endurance world,” he said.

The new car, which is

being developed in-house at Ferrari, looks set to be based on the 296 GTB unveiled earlier this year. An announcement is expected early next year on the model type ahead of the first tests of the race car.

Ferrari has stressed that it is not ending its relationship with Michelotto, which will continue to support the 488, and that it will be involved in future projects.

GARY WATKINS



WRX Cue inevitable 'back to the future' headline, but we'll let them off this time, because this is cool. World Rallycross Championship regular Guerlain Chicherit's GCK Motorsport is developing an electric version of the Lancia Delta Integrale rally titan for next season's new-look WRX. The Delta Evo-e is what Chicherit describes as his take on "a vehicle that made us all dream". "The race format lends itself perfectly to delivering one of the most thrilling sporting spectacles with electric cars so far," added Chicherit. **Image by GCK Motorsport**

IN THE HEADLINES

KYALAMI POSTPONED

The Intercontinental GT Challenge finale scheduled for Kyalami this weekend has been postponed to 5 February as a result of the latest restrictions on travel to South Africa after the detection of the new Omicron COVID variant in the country. The date will allow time for equipment to be shipped to next year's IGTC opener, the Bathurst 12 Hour set for 27 February.

G-DRIVE BACK IN WEC

G-Drive Racing is return to the World Endurance Championship full-time next year for the first time since 2017. The Russian entrant, which won the WEC P2 title in 2015, will field an ORECA-Gibson 07 supported by the Algarve Pro Racing team in the six-race series. No drivers have been announced, but Roman Rusinov will not be among them as he concentrates on his role as team principal. G-Drive will also enter the Daytona 24 Hours for the first time in January with a two-car attack.

HANSON RETURNS TO IMSA

Former World Endurance Championship title winner Phil Hanson will make a return to the IMSA SportsCar Championship next season with United Autosports alongside his WEC programme. The Briton, who took the 2019-20 WEC LMP2 crown with Filipe Albuquerque, will contest the four IMSA enduros that make up the Endurance Cup segment of the series. Hanson will share a United ORECA-Gibson 07 LMP2 entered at the Daytona, Sebring, Watkins Glen and Road Atlanta enduros with 2003 Le Mans 24 Hours winner Guy Smith and amateur driver Jim McGuire.

LUBIN ON ASIAN F3 GRID

GB3 racer Frederick Lubin is to contest the Asian F3 in the Middle East over January and February. Lubin will race with Evans GP, and will be joined by American David Morales, who raced this year in British F4.

Doohan among F2 debutants

FORMULA 2

Red Bull Junior and FIA Formula 3 runner-up Jack Doohan is among a raft of drivers making their Formula 2 debuts in this weekend's round at Jeddah.

Doohan, Williams F1 protege Logan Sargeant and FIA F3 race winner Olli Caldwell will all join the grid, along with the already confirmed Clement Novalak.

Australian Doohan, the son of bike legend Mick, is replacing Richard Verschoor at MP Motorsport for the final two rounds. "This opportunity will give me a little bit of a foundation and a base before I start my prep for next year," he said. "I don't have any real goals as I haven't been in anything higher than a Formula 3 car before. Free practice will be my first time in something higher than Formula 3, so

my expectations are very minimal."

American Sargeant has landed a seat for this weekend at HWA Racelab, but has not yet been confirmed for the final round at Yas Marina. He will be the fourth driver to occupy that particular car this season, following Matteo Nannini, Jack Aitken and Jake Hughes, as HWA enters its final events before bowing out of the category.

Caldwell, meanwhile, joins Campos Racing in place of David Beckmann, who has recently tried out for a DTM drive. The Briton is on board alongside Ralph Boschung for the final two rounds. He did not take part in the post-season FIA F3 test, and is targeting a full-time graduation to F2 after two seasons in the lower category. "I can't wait to see what the car can do and gain experience ahead of my goal of a full season in F2 next year," he said.

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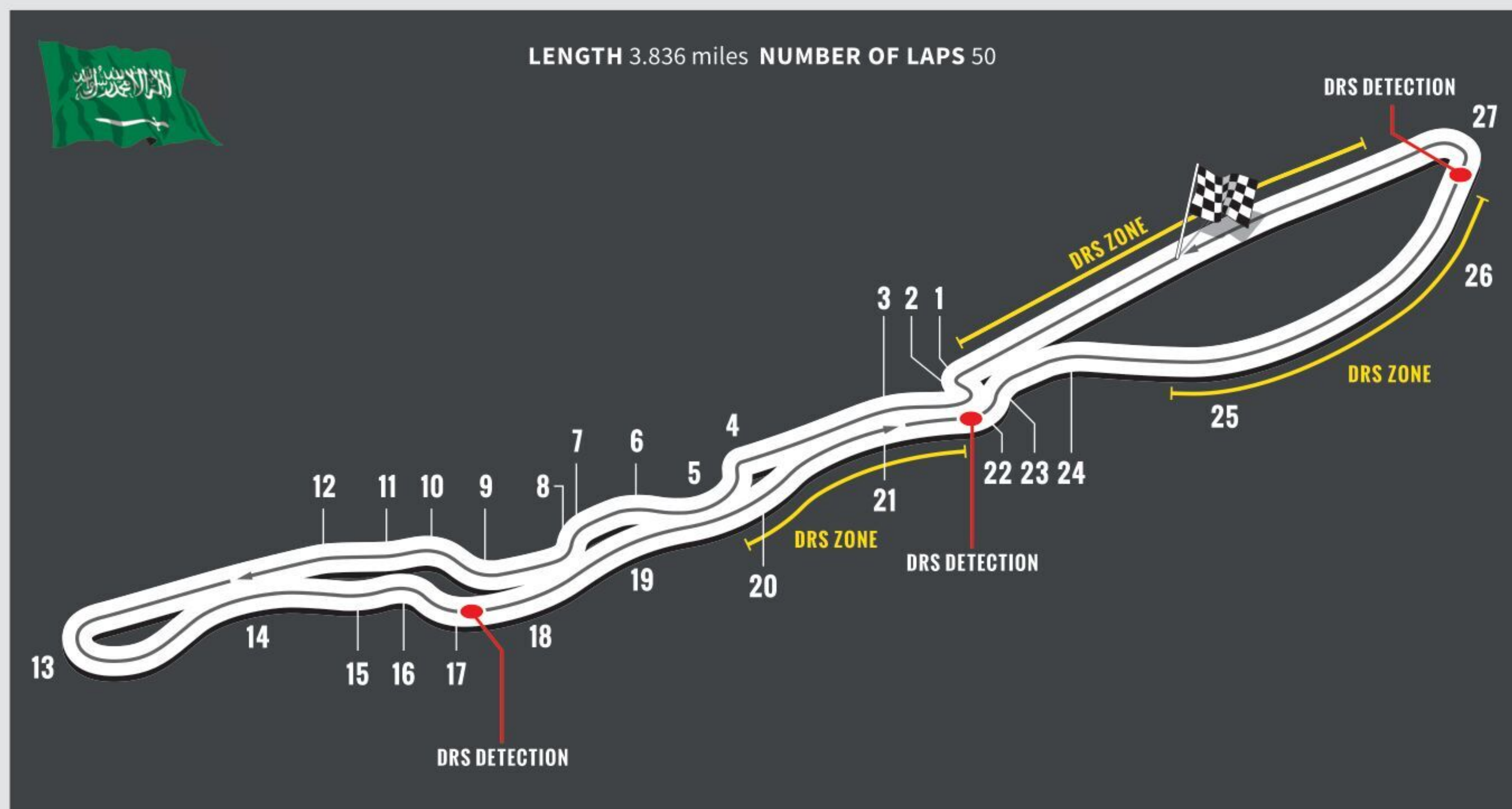
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F1 SAUDI ARABIAN GRAND PRIX PREVIEW



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Friday 3 December

FP1 1330 FP2 1700

Saturday 4 December

FP3 1400

QUALIFYING 1700

Sunday 5 December

RACE 1730

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CHAMPIONSHIP POSITIONS

Drivers

1	Verstappen	351.5
2	Hamilton	343.5
3	Bottas	203
4	Perez	190
5	Norris	153

Constructors

1	Mercedes	546.5
2	Red Bull	541.5
3	Ferrari	297.5
4	McLaren	258
5	Alpine	137



HONEY

First points-paying GP in an Arab nation was Morocco 1958, won by Stirling Moss's Vanwall



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Best results at first-time F1 venues

Hamilton	1st x 5
Vettel	1st x 2
Alonso	1st x 2
Raikkonen	1st x 1
Bottas	2nd x 2
Verstappen	2nd x 1
Perez	3rd x 1
Ricciardo	4th x 1
Leclerc	4th x 1
Ocon	5th x 1



What next for MotoGP after Rossi?

Motorcycle racing's greatest showman has left the stage. But in his successors who were inspired by Rossi, grand prix racing has vibrant new acts to keep us hooked

LEWIS DUNCAN

On Sunday 14 November, MotoGP's greatest chapter – and one of the best in all motorsport – came to a close. We all knew it was coming; Valentino Rossi had announced back in August that 2021 would be his last season in grand prix motorcycle racing.

Nevertheless, it was a reality hard to comprehend.

Rossi has been racing at world level since he burst onto the 125cc scene back in 1996, the Italian taking his first grand prix win on 18 August – just one week after this writer was born. For so many, Rossi has been a major part of their entire life. For MotoGP, he's been the most important part.

Grand Prix motorcycle racing has relished its popular eras and the figureheads that drove them. British fans of a certain vintage fondly remember the hedonistic days of Barry Sheene in the 1970s, while the 'golden era' of the late 1980s/early 1990s when the greats from America engaged in rivalries that stand the test of time still brings a joyful tear to the eye of many a diehard.

But the MotoGP landscape changed dramatically as the 1990s rolled on, the premier class falling short of the draw it used to be amid years of dominance for the mighty Mick Doohan and Honda. Rossi's arrival on the grand prix scene in 1996 caught the attention, and he'd already got tongues wagging in his pre-GP days.

As he ascended the ranks and claimed titles in the 125cc and 250cc classes in 1997 and 1999, big things were expected when he

“For 20 years, Dorna's marketing strategy has been thus: come for Rossi, stay for the show”

stepped up to the premier class in 2000. And big things followed: seven premier-class titles on Hondas and Yamahas, 89 top-tier wins for a total of 115, and some of racing's most intense rivalries.

His flamboyant personality, his penchant for wild helmet designs and wacky celebrations captured the hearts of millions worldwide, helping MotoGP to establish itself as one of the biggest motorsport series on the planet. And it has been reaping the rewards from Rossi for two decades, as he continued to evolve to bear new threats, even when the results started to dry up. For 20 years, promoter Dorna Sports' marketing strategy has been thus: come for Rossi, stay for the show.

Now that will truly be put to the test as MotoGP enters a new era. Some would have you believe that Rossi's retirement is the first sounding of the death knell for MotoGP, and there's a handful of

Rossi supporters who insist their interests will go elsewhere now their man is no longer racing. But given they've stayed the course even though his last win came back in 2017 and he ended 2021 18th in the points table, perhaps their principles aren't set in stone.

“I think Valentino is not replaceable in the sense that he was an iconic rider,” Ducati boss Paolo Ciabatti correctly pointed out. “I can only think about Giacomo Agostini in his years as being so famous outside the fanbase that we have for racing.”

“So, for sure it will not be easy to attract the same kind of attention from spectators who were liking the sport because they were willing to see what Valentino was doing when Valentino was winning. On the other hand, the competition on track is so exciting. We have many young riders who are super-fast, who are so much fun to watch. So, hopefully people who came to MotoGP to watch Valentino will realise that it's a nice show.”

The reality is that MotoGP is currently living in its greatest era, and it has done so largely with Rossi playing nothing more than a cameo role as the spoils have been shared between an enthralling cast of new runners.

Marc Marquez isn't exactly new, but at 28 he should have a long career ahead of him (once he shakes off his recent injury woes). Hot on his heels have been the newest world champions in Joan Mir and Fabio Quartararo – the man Yamaha deemed *the one* to replace Rossi in 2021 – while the likes of Francesco Bagnaia (a VR46 protege), Jorge Martin, Brad Binder, Miguel Oliveira, Jack Miller, Franco Morbidelli and Enea Bastianini, to name a few, all have title-fighting qualities.

Eight riders won races in 2021, nine did so the year before. Rossi wasn't close to being among them. That, of course, didn't stop the legions of supporters turning up to see him with hearts full of hope, but neither did it detract from the racing.

Silverstone managing director Stuart Pringle did admit to Autosport earlier this year that he was worried about the effect of losing Rossi as a selling point would have on future ticket sales. But, although the man has moved on, Rossi still very much runs through MotoGP's veins. All of the aforementioned stars were inspired by Rossi, the likes of Bagnaia's entire career owed to the legend. These riders are also more social media savvy, while a new Amazon docuseries will hopefully have a *Drive to Survive* effect on MotoGP.

With a VR46 team also coming to MotoGP alongside the ever-expanding roster of VR46 Academy riders filling grid slots (four will race on the grid in 2022), the sea of yellow that currently fills grandstands is still likely to remain – albeit, maybe with some different colours thrown in. 🏁

P38 ROSSI'S GREATEST RACES

YOUR SAY

It's early December, which would be perfect timing to resurrect the British Rallycross Grand Prix at Brands Hatch!

STUART GROVES

Blast from the past

A thought occurred while reading in last week's Autosport that the British Rallycross finale had been cancelled, forcing an early – and unsatisfactory – conclusion to the current campaign. It's early December, which would be perfect timing to resurrect the British Rallycross Grand Prix at Brands Hatch!

I've even had a look ahead to what the BBC has on for the next couple of weeks – frankly, they've got nothing, so there's surely room for them to resurrect *Grandstand* especially for the occasion?

Stuart Groves

Birmingham (via the 1980s, apparently)

Should we break the DRS train?

Would races be better if DRS could not be used every lap, eliminating the DRS train? Either give a number of activations per race, maybe six-10, or force a DRS 'rest' after deployment, so it cannot be used for the next one or two laps?

Nigel Charman

By email

Williams was a racer to his core

Other than perhaps Enzo Ferrari, has there ever been a greater exemplar of someone not having a compulsion to go racing, nor an obsession with it, but an existential need? Cheers, Sir Frank.

Graeme Innes-Johnstone

Elland



When is movable aero not movable aero?

In view of the regularly aired concerns and suspicions surrounding flexible aerodynamic components on Formula 1 car bodywork linked to the ban on 'movable aerodynamic devices', how is it that the 'movement' of the Mercedes rear wing assembly, governed by their rear suspension, is not banned as a 'movable aerodynamic device'? Downward movement of the wing is clearly benefiting performance, demonstrating its influence as a 'movable aerodynamic device'. Why no ban?

Pat Doyle

Hungerford

All wings move to some extent, otherwise they'd break under the load – and the FIA would have 20 protests every race! If the Mercedes wing passes the FIA's tests in scrutineering, then it's still legal – ed

Everyone knows the rules

In last week's magazine Chris Rose defended Max Verstappen's driving. He has been very protagonistic this season. Driving brilliantly but not giving an inch. He has run Lewis Hamilton off track several times and when Hamilton challenges that they end up in the gravel, with Max's car on top. Before the halo, he could have killed Hamilton. Rose-coloured spectacles, methinks.

I agree with Kevin Turner (Opinion, 25 November), everyone knows the rules, they are there to ensure fair play. If you fall foul, you deserve your penalty. Although I think the team should be penalised for technical mistakes, with points deducted, not the drivers.

Eric Bow

By email

Clarification

Autosport would like to clarify a point made in the British GT season review (18 November). Jordan Collard and James Kell ran out of fuel in the Donington Park finale due to a technical fault on the car while Collard was at the wheel. Kell was not to blame.

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INSIGHT FERRARI REVIVAL

WHAT FERRARI STILL NEEDS TO IMPROVE TO TAKE ANOTHER TITLE

ALEX KALINAUCKAS

PHOTOGRAPHY  **motorsport
IMAGES**

MAIN IMAGE: HONE





“Ferrari’s modest but important 2021 successes stem from the improvements it was able to make in turning the SF1000 into the SF21 for this year”

When the Ferrari SF21 was launched back in late February, Mattia Binotto was adamant that Ferrari would improve on its disastrous 2020 campaign. The team boss made no promises of victories or a title charge – that was simply never possible with the car carryover requirements forced upon the teams as a cost-saving measure amid the pandemic – but he did vow to make progress back towards the front. And Ferrari has certainly done that.

The shoots of recovery were clear to see by the start of summer. Ferrari had taken two shock pole positions and, although it was never in victory contention, mainly because Charles Leclerc was unable to start his home race in Monaco from the front of the grid, that was still far better than anything the SF1000 achieved on pure pace. And by almost every other statistical measure, Ferrari’s current challenger has made the 2021 campaign better than the woeful season the red team endured last year.

In 2020, Ferrari finished sixth in the constructors’ championship, taking three podiums, no poles and of course no wins. So far this year, it sits third in the teams’ standings, with four podiums (albeit one from the exclusion of former Ferrari star Sebastian Vettel’s Aston Martin in Hungary) and two poles. A victory still eludes the recovering squad, but Leclerc had a highly probable chance to win in Monaco before the team failed to spot the broken driveshaft hub on his car following his Q3 crash, and he so nearly scored a fantastic first position at Silverstone after the title contenders collided. Only a Lewis Hamilton charge in a Mercedes W12 that is nearly 0.8% faster (via Autosport’s supertimes calculations) than the SF21 relegated Leclerc to second.

Ferrari’s modest but important 2021 successes stem from the



improvements it was able to make in turning the SF1000 into the SF21. This featured the new gearbox design and overall work at the rear of the car (including the challenge of incorporating the new floor and diffuser rules) to improve the previous design’s poor handling in this area.

The car’s positive front end and compliant behaviour over bumps and kerbs led to its strong showing in Monaco and was behind Leclerc’s other pole in Baku. The team’s pace was also good on other high-downforce tracks in Hungary and Mexico, as well as over the heavy bumps at Austin.

Leclerc’s performance at Silverstone was rather unexpected, but the SF1000 wasn’t exactly lacking in downforce-generating devices needed to do well at such tracks, it’s just that it was famously robbed of power potency by Ferrari’s controversial settlement with the FIA regarding its previous power unit design. With the reworked engine the team introduced for the start of the current campaign, the output was much better – albeit still around 20bhp down on Honda and Mercedes – and it meant Ferrari could stay in the hunt at races such as the British Grand Prix, if opportunities came its way. There is still frustration at the squad regarding Leclerc being eliminated from the Hungarian GP by Lance Stroll’s first-corner gaffe, given he, and Daniel Ricciardo to the outside, were set to gain massively thanks to Valtteri Bottas causing the initial pile-up.

But Ferrari’s 2021 season really took off after the summer break, specifically after it had chosen to introduce an upgraded hybrid system at the Russian GP in September. Initially, this was just for Leclerc’s car, with Carlos Sainz Jr getting the new component, which doubles the capacity of the energy store, at the following round in Turkey.

Musical chairs: Sainz left McLaren to replace Vettel at Ferrari, then Ricciardo moved from Renault to McLaren after 2020

Monaco error proved costly for Leclerc

FERRARI IN THE TURBO-HYBRID ERA

YEAR	POINTS	CHAMP POS	WINS
2014	216	4th	0
2015	428	2nd	3
2016	398	3rd	0
2017	522	2nd	5
2018	571	2nd	6
2019	504	2nd	3
2020	131	6th	0
2021	297.5	3rd	0

The team's logic was that it was worth taking the resulting grid penalties because running the new hybrid system would mean it could gather critical real-world data on how it would then fit into its package for the 2022 rules-reset cars, which are finally about to make their bows. The new parts are thought to be worth close to 10bhp in the overall power stakes, cutting the remaining gap to F1's leading engines by nearly 50%, but critically they allow for the hybrid system to be used for longer without running into overheating problems.

The bonus benefit of taking extra engines has been clear to see ever since Sochi. In the four races since both of its drivers started running the upgrade without being saddled with grid penalties, Ferrari has outscored McLaren (which, it must be acknowledged, has also had a terrible run of luck with incidents across both its cars in those events) by 65 points to 18, and has cemented itself as favourite to clinch third in the constructors' championship.

McLaren insists that Ferrari always had the stronger 2021 package, regularly pointing to its pair of early-season poles, with the British team's coming via Lando Norris and the drying-track challenge in Q3 at Sochi, where Sainz joined him on the front row. It was all very late-1990s/2000s, even if they were not fighting for the top spots on a regular basis.

The scrap for third looks to be ever more firmly heading in Ferrari's direction, but it is intriguing to consider how much harder it would have been for the Italian team had Ricciardo been

able to match Norris's pace and results in the MCL35M from the off.

In any case, Alpine's sensational points haul last time out in Qatar – where the high-speed, flowing track layout is another example of such circuits compressing F1's midfield considerably – shows how a seemingly decided championship battle (over fifth with AlphaTauri) can be blown wide open very quickly. In the same way, the chance of Max Verstappen and Hamilton crashing again before the season finally concludes means a team such as Ferrari needs to be ready to seize any chance that comes its way in the final rounds, as McLaren did at Monza.

"Obviously the championship is not over yet," Binotto said after Sainz and Leclerc finished seventh and eighth last time out in Qatar, fortunate not to lose ground to McLaren for the first time since Sochi only thanks to Norris's late puncture. "There are two races to go, and we are really focusing on trying to be the best for the last two. But if I look at where we were last year, sixth, with few points

in the championship, I think we made the most we could do with the current regulations and the most of the car, [which] had also very limited opportunities of development as well in 2021 – we had to put priorities to develop [for] 2022 instead of 2021.

"So, overall, the team has made great progress with what was possible to do. And for that I am so happy because yes, third position is a great output for the efforts."

While the results logged so far and Ferrari's current championship position compared to 2020 rather speak for themselves, it's worth >>

Only Hamilton stood between Leclerc and victory at Silverstone

SUTTON

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MAUGER



Leclerc vs Norris:
both deserve regular
race-winning cars

considering where else the team needs to improve to challenge Mercedes and Red Bull in 2022.

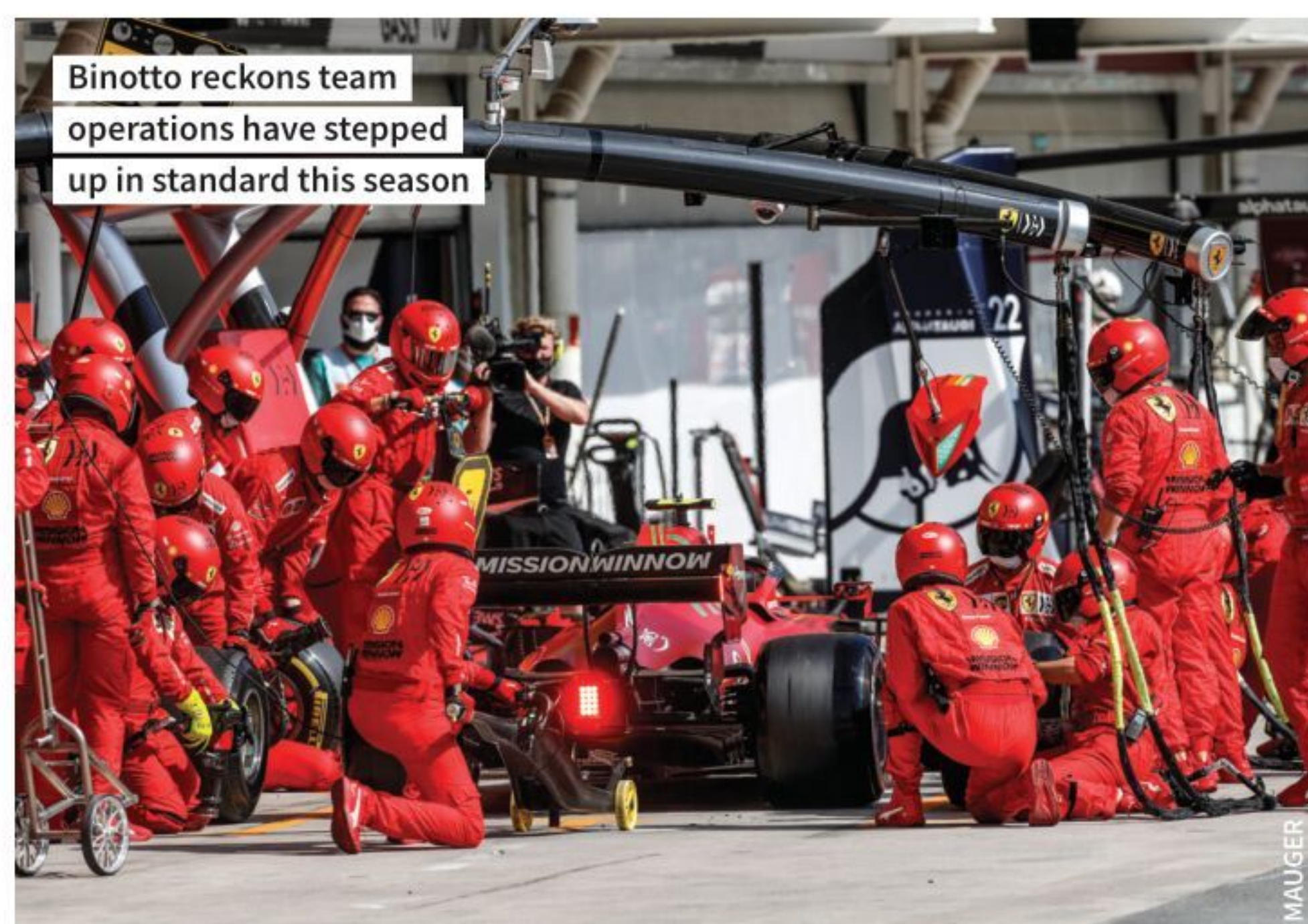
The car rules revolution offers the chance for any team to make a big step up the grid, but paddock insiders insist that the skills and technology the leading teams have developed up to this point in the hybrid era will carry over to a certain extent next year as well. Whether that's regarding certain tyre tricks, set-up arrangements or engine gains, few expect the current 'Class A' teams to suddenly lose what makes them special.

The big hope for a team such as Ferrari is that by having to find an extra edge while engaging in the ultra-close fight to win in 2021, one of Mercedes or Red Bull – or both – has had to devote additional, perhaps unexpected, resources that would otherwise be going towards their 2022 challengers. This could mean starting off F1's new era at least slightly on the back foot, which would be offset somewhat by having the enhanced nous and knowledge that title fight pressures tend to cultivate.

That is something Ferrari has lacked during these two seasons fighting in the midfield, but where else does it need to be stronger to match Mercedes and Red Bull overall, with the potential of the new cars removed? Autosport puts this to Binotto over the Qatar weekend and his answer is routine, but nevertheless revealing.

"Looking at 2022, obviously we are back at the factory working very hard to develop the new car and we can only wait and see when we are back on track at the start of next season," he replies.

"If I look at the race team, [that] is what we can judge at the end of Qatar. I think the race team since the start of the season has made a



Binotto reckons team
operations have stepped
up in standard this season

MAUGER



“Since Paul Ricard we developed a lot of small tools and methodologies to manage tyre wear better”

lot of progress in terms of strategy, the way we manage driver communication, the understanding of what we are doing.

“It has improved a lot in terms of tyre management. [Qatar was] a circuit where you are wearing the tyres a lot due to the high energy of the corners. I think that since Paul Ricard [in June] the team developed a lot of small tools and methodologies to try to do it better, and [in Qatar] our two drivers always tried to control the pace – never push the limits, which can be very difficult for them because they are very keen to push more. But we told them to always try to control the pace because we knew this was a racecourse wearing a lot of front rubber. I think taking no risk at the end [meant] we have maybe some luck but have also seen some benefits in the results [with Norris among the drivers picking up a puncture].

“And finally, the pitstops. These were managed well after a triple header and the mechanics were tired – they had to change a chassis in one car [Leclerc’s] but they did fantastic work pitting two cars in a row. Overall, judging how the team is doing is progress and that’s great, especially in view of what we will do in 2022.”

One of the critical decisions Ferrari took in its plan to get back among F1’s frontrunners and finally challenge for titles, which have eluded the team for approaching 15 years, was in the aerodynamic development of the SF21. Other than making a few tweaks around adapting to a ‘Z-floor’ in the opening rounds – it ran a tapered one in the pre-season – Ferrari has not made any aero developments of note. It switched its attentions in this area to 2022 very early, but it’s interesting that, had it not made such positive progress through the early stages of its recovery plan, Ferrari might have actually been able to make additional gains with its 2022 design.

This is because of the new rules regarding Aerodynamic Testing Periods with windtunnels and CFD tools, F1’s new (and very minor) form of performance balancing, which kicked in for this year. Now, the teams further down the constructors’ championship are able to use up to 12.5% more ATP time than was allowed in 2020, with the top team having this reduced by 10% at the same time. Ferrari had an extra 2.5% of ATP time to use for finishing sixth last year, but its position halfway through this year, where the sliding-scale allocation in this area changed based on the results at 30 June, meant it moved to having 5% less than it started 2021 (so 2.5% down on the time allowed last year) for the second half of the season.

But Binotto is adamant that the benefits of the progress >>

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Ferrari's recovery plan has 'naturally' gained are worth losing the extra hours running its windtunnel and CFD kit.

"We never really developed the current car," he says of Ferrari's approach to its resource allocation and planning throughout the current calendar year. "We introduced a couple of developments at the very start of the season and that's it, except for the power unit later on. But that was a development in view of 2022, so all our efforts from the very start of the season have always been for the 2022 car – we never compromised it. So let's say that it never came into our mind even to at some stage try to penalise 2022 at the benefit of 2021 [with extra ATP time]."

"We knew that we could fight for the third place at the start of this season, we knew it could be very tight, but we knew that our main objective in 2021 was not third place but to try to improve in all the details as a team. And third place has simply been an output of it. I think if today we are reaching third place it's because the team, the way they are working at various weekends, has certainly improved a lot since the start of the season and not because the car itself has developed."

Binotto's words reveal much about the journey Ferrari has been on this year, but also where it still needs to travel to match the teams currently ahead in the constructors' championship. He highlights how the team operated in terms of tyre management in Qatar, making the tricky one-stop strategy work to get both cars in the points. But Sainz and Leclerc were driving very conservatively to make sure their rubber would go the distance. They were fearful of a repeat of the French GP tyre woe Binotto references, where the team had its first (and so far, only) non-score of the season as its cars chewed through their tyres at an alarming rate and Leclerc in particular slumped down the order.

The team immediately decamped to Maranello to put in three days of solid simulator running to figure out what had gone so badly wrong. This work resulted in improved tyre management, such as the performance Leclerc deployed so well at Silverstone. This also helped Ferrari avoid the puncture drama in Qatar. F1's tyres are changing for 2022, with the switch to 18-inch wheels. Any team that can nail understanding the new rubber will gain a big advantage.

This is a lesson that can be seen playing out regularly in the Red Bull versus Mercedes battle – particularly in Turkey and Qatar, where decisions on car set-up and getting the tyres to adapt to new surfaces cost Red Bull dearly. Alpine's Fernando Alonso insisted he could have gone faster on the one-stopper had he needed to when it came to defending against the charging Sergio Perez last time out. That the Ferraris were well adrift of that podium hunt (and qualified behind the Alpine) suggests there is still progress it needs to make in this crucial area ahead of 2022.

Another one concerns team operations. Binotto suggests that

"We knew our main objective in 2021 was not third place but to improve as a team"

Ferrari has improved considerably here, and that Qatar double-stack stop was indeed very impressive, but missing the driveshaft hub

damage overnight ahead of the Monaco race on Leclerc's car cost him a near-certain victory on home soil. No team is infallible in this area, as evidenced by Mercedes and its loose DRS screws on Hamilton's rear wing that could have been so costly in Brazil (although being disqualified from qualifying at Interlagos actually appears to have paid off handsomely in motivating the world champion to reach greater heights). But Ferrari cannot afford to make such a mistake again if finally it is back in the hunt for titles in 2022, especially if the gaps between the teams are as close as F1 hopes thanks to the new rules.

Then there's engine power. The new hybrid system has provided a substantial boost, but the Ferrari powerplant is still not back to bothering the Honda (soon to be rebranded as Red Bull Powertrains) or the Mercedes. If Ferrari can crack this, without controversy, then it will surely be an F1 force to be reckoned with once again.

One area where Ferrari really doesn't need to improve to match Mercedes and Red Bull concerns its driver line-up. So far in 2021, Sainz has scored 95.7% of Leclerc's points total, and that's the closest gap between team-mates at a squad that has points on the board (next up is Aston Martin, with Stroll having 79.1% of Vettel's haul). That is a massive improvement compared to 2020, when Vettel brought home just 33.7% of Leclerc's total as his time as a Ferrari driver came to an underwhelming conclusion.

Sainz has seriously impressed many in the F1 paddock with how close he has got to Leclerc in his first year as a Ferrari driver (see right). The Monegasque has still had the higher peaks – such as that Silverstone race drive – but Sainz's own efforts have actually made Leclerc's results appear more erratic, because his new team-mate is able to be so much closer than Vettel achieved last year.

"I said at the start of the season that I believe I've got the best line-up on the grid," Binotto says of his drivers. "I still believe that it is the best line-up, with the way they are working together and with the consistency of the results."

Binotto can certainly claim that Ferrari currently has F1's best driver pairing, but that mantle will be seriously tested once George Russell slots in alongside Hamilton at Mercedes next year. And if Ricciardo can stay on his current course and regularly match Norris



Sainz and Leclerc:
F1's strongest pairing?

COATES



All focus at Ferrari has been on the rules reset due in 2022 as the team eyes a return to the front of the grid

COATES



Ferrari is on course to beat McLaren in the standings

SUTTON

as McLaren heads into 2022 hoping for its own vault back into title consideration, then there will be further challenges to that claim. At the same time, these strong pairings again highlight that Red Bull's driver line-up remains rather unbalanced, despite Sergio Perez's best efforts (he has 54.1% of Verstappen's points) to close the gap in the tricky RB16B...

Leclerc and Sainz have also formed a rather friendly and engaging partnership at Ferrari this year, but that relationship will come under new strain if they find themselves in a title battle any time soon. And that is another crucial element Binotto and co must hope has improved away from the spotlight of a championship challenge, because in the last year when Ferrari was able to bother Mercedes and Red Bull – 2019 – things between Leclerc and Vettel imploded spectacularly.

But before it has to worry about such things being scrutinised, the only big test that really matters is about to come for Ferrari. This is how the coming car for which it sacrificed this year performs in 2022. The same is true for so many F1 teams, but what is clear for Ferrari is that not only did it make its terrible 2020 machine much better in an off-season of regulation-limited development, but it did that and also made considerable gains as a whole squad as the year has gone on. This is all without the major aero upgrades that would typically take place.

That bodes well. Ferrari was a team on the up midway through 2021, and it seems to be very much still on its target trajectory heading into F1's new era. ❧



FIAPOOL

Sainz ready for Ferrari's next step

Formula 1 is having a season to savour. The title fight between Max Verstappen and Lewis Hamilton should go to the wire and there are storylines to dig into everywhere. At Ferrari, the results from its new driver line-up are eyecatching too.

The team moved decisively to ditch Sebastian Vettel ahead of what would become his final season in red last year. At the same time, Ferrari was moving to pair Charles Leclerc with Carlos Sainz Jr. It was quite a step for a driver who had been heading towards an F1 exit as a result of Daniel Ricciardo's Renault deal in mid-2018. Two years later, Ricciardo was scrambling to replace Sainz at McLaren for 2021...

Leclerc's qualities have continued to shine. Had it not been for his Monaco DNS (ultimately his own fault given that costly Q3 crash) and Lance Stroll's inadequacies at the first corner

in Hungary, the points gap between the Ferrari pair would be bigger. But Sainz has seriously impressed so far in 2021.

Leclerc, who Ferrari says still needs to sharpen up on his technical feedback and cut out the odd qualifying error, has led the way overall. But Sainz has been very close to his new team-mate's pace. Of the four who switched squads over the 2020-21

off-season, the Spaniard adapted to his new team the fastest.

A pair of podiums has been his reward, plus the bonus rostrum result from Vettel's Hungary disqualification. Sainz admits starts and the opening laps of races have been tricky for him since joining Ferrari, grappling with getting the SF21 to respond as he wants in the turbulent air the closed-up pack creates. And he sometimes struggles with locking front tyres.

But what has really shone is how unfazed he has found transitioning to F1's most storied squad. Team insiders speak of how down to earth he remains, even with the increased expectation that comes with driving for Ferrari. The team's lack of frontrunning profile helps, but at 27 there's little to suggest that Sainz won't be able to cope if Ferrari can get back into championship contention via the 2022 rules reset.

He's fully bought into the Ferrari recovery project too, as his thoughts on the team's current challenge – beating his former team to third in the 2021 constructors' championship – attest. "I think it's more symbolic than anything else," says Sainz. "Mainly because as Ferrari we want to win. OK, P3 is better than P4, but we want to win, and we are preparing ourselves to have the opportunity to win in the future. And we feel like this battle with McLaren is a good training for us."

"It's a good preparation in case next year we are in the mix, and we are battling for P1 in the constructors' and the drivers'. We feel like this training against such a strong team as McLaren, where they are managing to pretty much every single weekend maximise the result and the potential of their car. They are very good at executing race weekends. I feel like this training against them is going to prepare us well for whatever comes in the future."

"This battle with McLaren is good training for whatever comes in the future"

SEASON
REVIEW

QUICK QUARTARARO DEFIES QUIXOTIC QUESTIONS

Doubts were cast over Yamaha's French recruit, but he answered them in the best possible way in 2021 to claim a convincing MotoGP title

LEWIS DUNCAN

PHOTOGRAPHY GOLD AND GOOSE



“T

hey were a total disaster. I just wanted to finish the championship whatever the position was.”

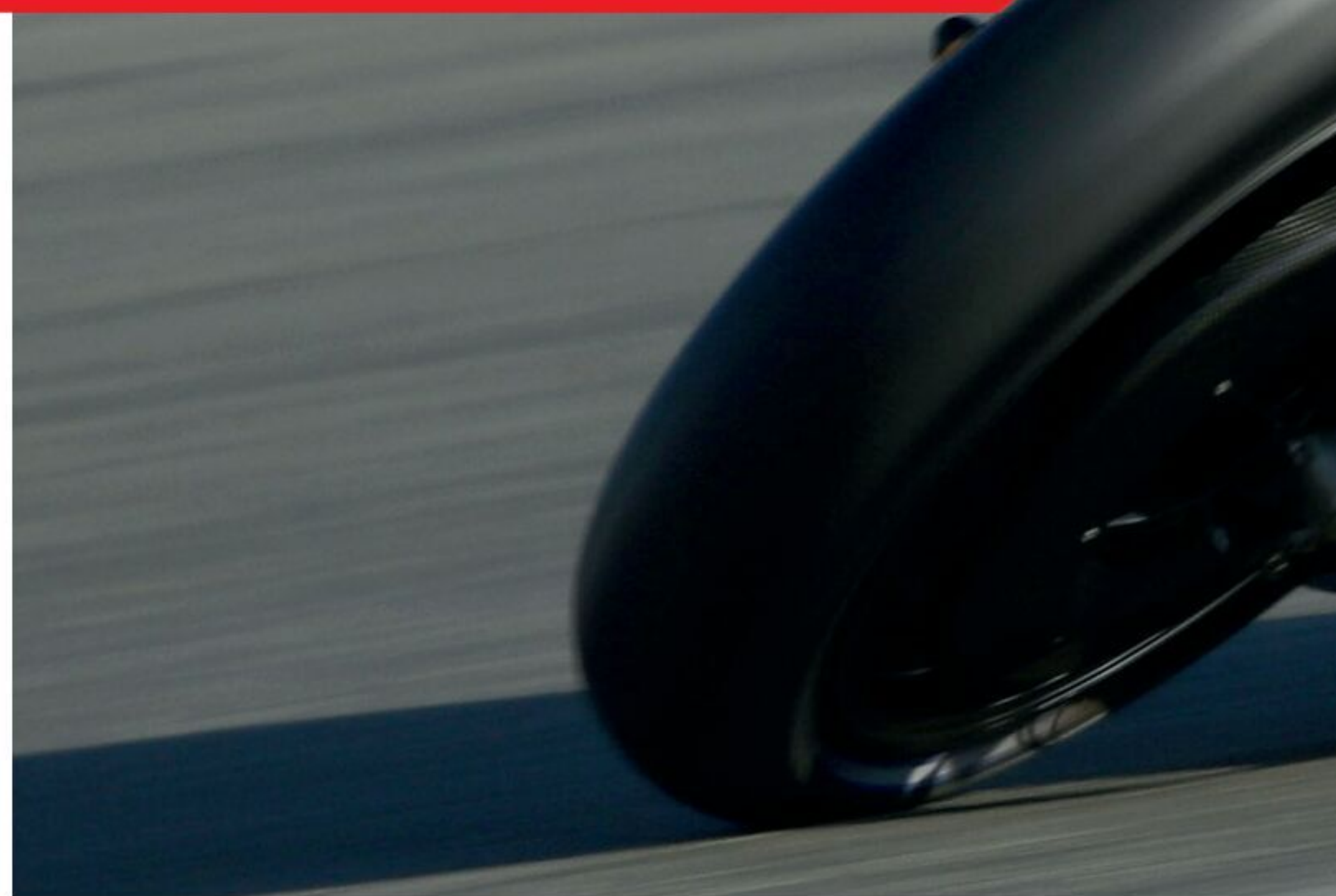
This was how Fabio Quartararo began to reflect on his historic MotoGP title success at the conclusion of October's Emilia Romagna Grand Prix. He was referring to the final three rounds of the 2020 campaign, his second in MotoGP, which had started with wins in the first two races and ended with his title hopes crumbling to nothing after a nightmare end to a season in which he would ultimately finish eighth.

The Yamaha package with which Quartararo had been armed for 2020 was wildly inconsistent. With COVID-19 forcing a development freeze on engines, that bike would carry over into 2021. He was already fielding questions about how worthy he was of a place in MotoGP, and those were only heightened by the fact that he was stepping into the factory Yamaha seat from which the Japanese manufacturer had ousted the icon Valentino Rossi, a move confirmed in January 2020.

So Yamaha had its work cut out over the winter to engineer its way out of the hole it had dug itself with its troubled 2020 challenger. But Quartararo also knew he needed to effect change within, and opened up about his work with a sports psychologist: “My main goal was for him to help me to stay calm. He gave me some exercises that I do before the practices or when I feel I need to do these exercises. It's just a reminder that when I'm angry or unhappy, I just do these exercises and it's keeping me calm – it's nothing more.”



MotoGP legend Valentino Rossi bowed out of the sport he has bestrode



It's clear how this manifested itself. In the Qatar Grand Prix opener in March, Quartararo says he rode like a bit of an amateur to fifth, while Yamaha team-mate Maverick Vinales stormed to his best win in the premier class. But a week later he responded emphatically by taking victory in the Doha GP, after qualifying fifth and dropping to the fringes of the top 10 in the early stages. He struggled to 13th when arm pump robbed him of a surefire victory at Jerez, and a fortnight later, following surgery on his arm, the Frenchman guided his Yamaha to third at Le Mans in flag-to-flag conditions (where changeable weather necessitates a bike swap) that had previously caused him no end of problems. Demoted to sixth following a penalty for a leathers issue at Barcelona, he rebounded in Germany to take third, and won at Silverstone after struggling to seventh in the Austrian GP.

After a tyre problem forced him to wobble to eighth at the Aragon GP, Quartararo responded with a second-place finish at the San Marino GP. His ability to emphatically respond to setbacks was arguably the key to his title success, something Marc Marquez noted: “Fabio did an incredible season. He was able to be fast, he was able to be consistent. But especially, and it's something very difficult to have, he was able to suffer.”

That ability “to suffer” was also married to devastating speed. The more consistent M1 package in 2021 allowed Quartararo to claim five wins across the campaign at the Doha, Portuguese, Italian,



Yamaha worked hard to banish 2020 woes, and Quartararo got his head in the right place

Dutch and British GPs. His victory charges at Losail and the Algarve circuit, when he was forced into recovery rides after shaky starts, highlighted how much the Yamaha had improved – pack races, particularly against Ducatis, were the bane of the manufacturer's riders in 2020. The Mugello victory proved that both rider and bike could be strong at venues that exposed the M1's chief weakness of top speed, while his Assen and Silverstone wins were the ultimate display of rider and bike working in harmony. Quartararo called his Mugello win "the key point", since he came out of it with the full 25 points on a weekend when Ducati's Francesco Bagnaia was "super-strong" and "took a lot of confidence back" after putting another Ducati, that of Pramac's Johann Zarco, in his place in an early duel.

Bagnaia himself has repeatedly pinpointed Mugello as a critical moment in his unsuccessful title bid – not that he had any preconceived notions about mounting a challenge in 2021. That was borne out of two incredibly difficult years in 2019 and 2020 on the Pramac Ducati. But a promotion to the factory Ducati squad for 2021 alongside Jack Miller led to the Italian making big strides as a rider. Chiefly, his area of focus was tyre warm-up, something he spent hours working on at Misano on his Panigale street bike and at mentor Rossi's ranch on off-road machinery.

Three podiums from the first four races offered Bagnaia a solid platform to build his season around, but his results took a slight dip from May's French GP through to the Styrian in August.

Here, he registered a fourth, a DNF, seventh, fifth, sixth and 11th, though the last of those, at the Red Bull Ring, was due to misfortune when the tyre he switched to for the restart after a red flag proved to be dodgy. This would strike him again at Silverstone, where he struggled to 14th.

Silverstone aside, Bagnaia's second half to the 2021 campaign was truly stunning. A maiden victory at Motorland Aragon after fending off a charging Marc Marquez was followed by a second win at Misano, where he held his nerve on fading soft rubber while Quartararo on a medium Michelin rear hunted him down. By now he had also nailed qualifying. Quartararo himself went on a run after April's Doha GP to October's Americas GP of qualifying on the front row, but from Assen in late June through to the end of the year, Bagnaia was always inside the top three on Saturdays. Even so, he was continuing to pay for his early-season inconsistency.

With 52 points splitting him from Quartararo heading into the Emilia Romagna GP, Bagnaia needed a win. But he would crash late on as he led, throwing away a golden opportunity to at least keep the game alive into the penultimate round presented by his pole and Quartararo's poor grid spot of 15th.

How different things could have been... Quartararo crashed out of the November Algarve GP to register his first DNF, and struggled to fifth in the Valencia finale, while Bagnaia won both. It's all ifs and buts in the end, but Ducati spent 2021 refining its bike into »

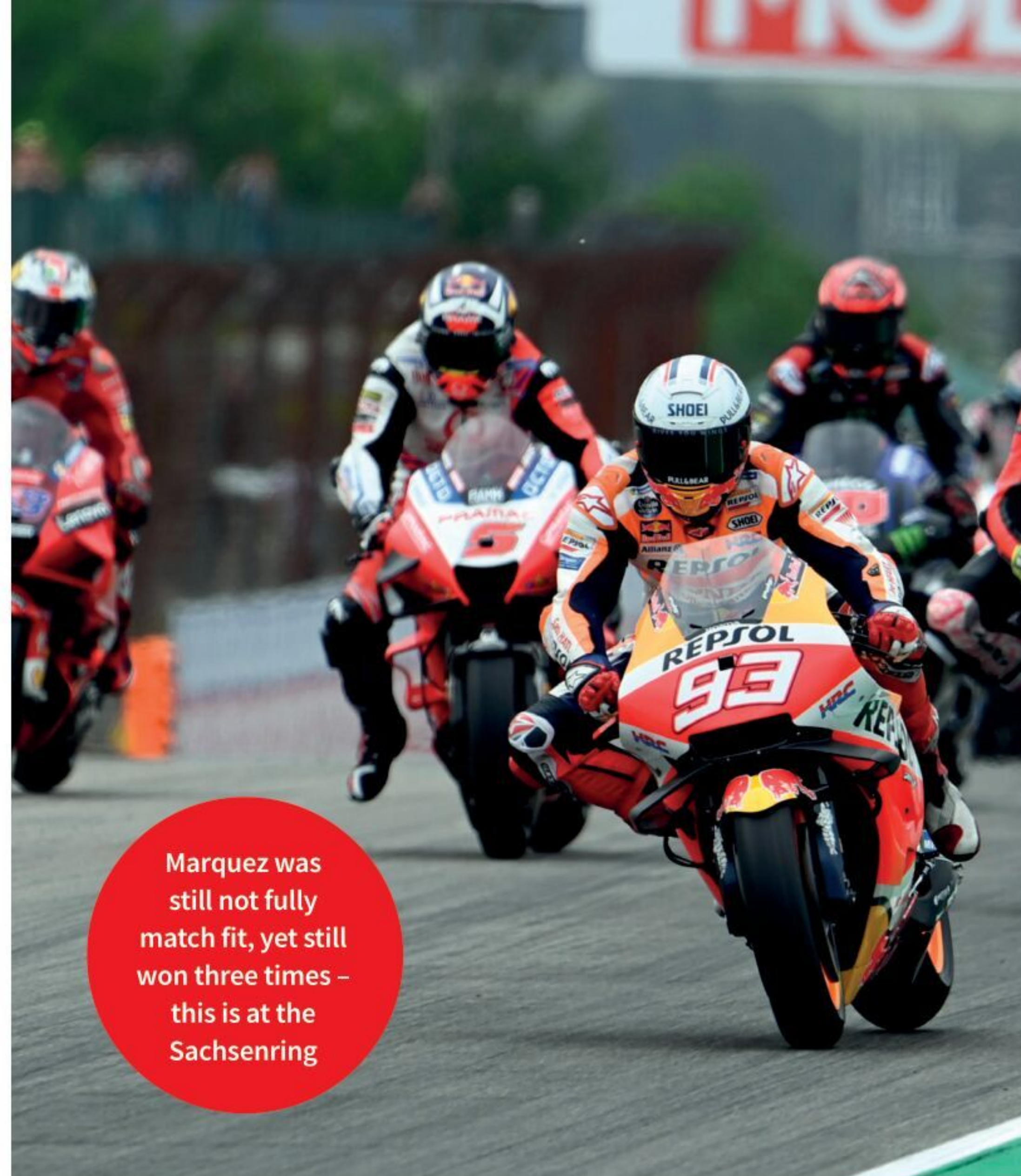
arguably the best on the grid – one that had brute power, but could also turn and was consistently quick. It's no wonder Quartararo ended 2021 "worried" about the Borgo Panigale marque's potential for next year. Initial tests of the 2022 Yamaha yielded little positivity from Quartararo, and he's issued an ultimatum: he won't sign anything for 2023 until he sees tangible progress from Yamaha, particularly with its engine.

Ducati had a complement of riders who could challenge at the front in 2021, with Miller winning twice, Pramac rookie Jorge Martin claiming victory at the Styrian GP, while team-mate Zarco scored four second-place finishes. Even Avintia rookie Enea Bastianini on a two-year-old Ducati managed two podiums, at both Misano races.

Yamaha, on the other hand, had a more fragmented campaign. Vinales's strong start in the Qatar GP would prove to be his sole victory in 2021. From then on he struggled for consistency, with the nadir coming at the German GP where he qualified 21st and finished the race 19th. This is when the cracks in the relationship between Yamaha and Vinales really appeared, but in truth it had been souring for months.

After finishing second at the Dutch TT, Vinales announced on the Monday that he was quitting the team a year early. And as frustration boiled in a difficult Styrian GP, he was suspended before being dropped by Yamaha for deliberately trying to damage his M1's engine in the race. He would find sanctuary at Aprilia from the San Marino GP onwards as he begins a new chapter. But Yamaha's fortunes with its other riders were hardly better. Franco Morbidelli, 2020 runner-up, managed third at Jerez but could do little on an ageing 2019 Yamaha run by Petronas SRT, before a knee injury ahead of the Assen round completely wrecked his campaign.

With Morbidelli promoted to the factory squad from the San Marino GP, the rest of the year was about learning his new team



Marquez was still not fully match fit, yet still won three times – this is at the Sachsenring

and bike. At Petronas SRT, his replacement Andrea Dovizioso was in the same boat, while Rossi was underperforming on the championship-winning bike. Yamaha boss Lin Jarvis summed up his marque's season as "one up, but three down".

But it's not just Yamaha scrabbling for an answer to quell the oncoming Ducati onslaught in 2022. Suzuki was dealt a major blow in the off season when talismanic team manager Davide Brivio upped sticks and headed to Formula 1 with Alpine. The team elected against replacing him, instead forming a seven-person management committee. It would prove to be a major error, as disharmony started to fill the team's ranks.

Joan Mir spent the winter battling off suggestions that his 2020 championship victory wasn't legitimate given the absence of Marquez. These were, of course, nonsense, but Mir was severely hampered by a lack of development in the GSX-RR in 2021. His season wasn't awful, the outgoing champion generally extracting the absolute maximum from what he had at his disposal as he scored 12 top-six finishes, including six podiums. But a second MotoGP victory did not come to pass and third in the standings, 70 points adrift of Quartararo, led him to concede that he "couldn't have done better" in 2021. The same couldn't be said of team-mate Alex Rins, who scored just one podium – a second at Silverstone – in a campaign in which he finished with just 99 points after crashing far too many times while in podium positions.

Save for a victory at Barcelona for Miguel Oliveira following a



KTM shone only briefly and Oliveira seized his chance to win Catalan GP

ROUND BY ROUND

Qatar GP

- 1 Maverick Vinales**
- 2 Johann Zarco**
- 3 Francesco Bagnaia**

Vinales opens up the 2021 campaign with an emphatic victory, but it will prove to be a false dawn for the Yamaha rider and the high point of his season. His team-mate Quartararo is fifth in an average display.

Doha GP

- 1 Fabio Quartararo**
- 2 Johann Zarco**
- 3 Jorge Martin**

Quartararo recovers from a poor start to win, while 2020 world champion Mir and Miller come to blows. Rookie Martin stuns with pole and leads most of the race before finishing third behind Pramac team-mate Zarco.

Portuguese GP

- 1 Fabio Quartararo**
- 2 Francesco Bagnaia**
- 3 Joan Mir**

Poleman Quartararo resists a race-long assault from Rins before a crash for the Suzuki gifts the Yamaha rider a second win of 2021. Bagnaia rises from 11th to second, and Marquez makes his long-awaited return in seventh.

Spanish GP

- 1 Jack Miller**
- 2 Francesco Bagnaia**
- 3 Franco Morbidelli**

Arm-pump problems rob Quartararo of a win and dump him down to 13th, and Ducati man Miller capitalises for his first win since 2016. He leads team-mate Bagnaia, while Morbidelli makes his only podium appearance of 2021.

French GP

- 1 Jack Miller**
- 2 Johann Zarco**
- 3 Fabio Quartararo**

Miller doubles up for Ducati in the flag-to-flag race after runaway leader Marquez crashes out. Home heroes Zarco and Quartararo complete the podium as a number of riders crash out of good positions in the tricky conditions.

Italian GP

- 1 Fabio Quartararo**
- 2 Miguel Oliveira**
- 3 Joan Mir**

Tragedy mars the Mugello weekend with the death of 19-year-old Moto3 racer Jason Dupasquier. Early leader Bagnaia crashes out on lap two, before Quartararo repels an early attack from Zarco to win for a third time in 2021.



“THE BIGGEST MOUNTAIN FACING A MANUFACTURER OVER THE WINTER IS THAT OF HONDA”

chassis change at Mugello, and Brad Binder’s heroic ride to win a rain-hit Austrian GP on slick tyres, KTM’s high points were few and far between as it struggled for consistency with its RC16. Aprilia scored a breakthrough podium at Silverstone courtesy of Aleix Espargaro, but remains some way off regularly achieving such results.

But the biggest mountain facing a manufacturer over the winter is that of Honda. In 2020 it endured its first winless campaign in the premier class ever since it returned full time in 1982, and 2021 remained largely difficult. A lack of rear grip on the RC213V caused problems from corner entry to corner exit, while a lack of testing pre-season hindered new signing Pol Espargaro’s season – a single podium, albeit his best result in MotoGP of second at the Emilia Romagna GP, was all he had to show for a campaign he later admitted he was underprepared for.

Salvation for Honda, as it has done so often, rested on Marc Marquez’s shoulders. After spending the 2020 season on the >>

TAINTED BY TRAGEDY



Dupasquier died after an incident in Italian GP qualifying

The 2021 MotoGP season will be remembered for its thrilling action and historic championship result. But it was a year overshadowed by multiple tragedies in the motorcycle racing world. During the Italian GP weekend, 19-year-old Moto3 racer Jason Dupasquier died after an incident in qualifying. In July, in a European Talent Cup race, 14-year-old Hugo Milan died in a similar multi-rider incident. And in September, Maverick Vinales’s 15-year-old cousin Dean Berta Vinales died in a World Supersport 300 race.

With two children among the fallen in incidents in 2021, a call for change came from the entire motorcycle racing world. Dorna Sports and the FIM listened and have enacted change to try to stop such tragedies. Most notably, new minimum age limits have been introduced for all of its series, with riders now needing to be 16 to compete in Moto3 and Moto2. The minimum age limit for MotoGP remains 18.

Age limits across other junior series will also come into effect and will rise in the coming years. Grid sizes in Moto3-style classes are also going to be capped – a reaction to the Vinales incident, which took place among a field of over 40 motorcycles.

Riding standards have also been clamped down on, with harsher punishments being handed out. That last change is likely to have the biggest effect on safety, while a working group set up within Dorna will ensure continued progress on this issue.

Catalan GP

- 1 Miguel Oliveira
- 2 Johann Zarco
- 3 Jack Miller

Oliveira uses a boost from a new KTM chassis to take his only victory of the season. Quartararo is demoted to sixth with a penalty after his race leathers burst open late on and he discards his chest protector.

German GP

- 1 Marc Marquez
- 2 Miguel Oliveira
- 3 Fabio Quartararo

Marquez uses the anti-clockwise Sachsenring to full effect to take a stunning comeback victory two years after his last. Quartararo salvages third behind Oliveira, as cracks in the Vinales/Yamaha relationship begin to properly show.

Dutch TT

- 1 Fabio Quartararo
- 2 Maverick Vinales
- 3 Joan Mir

Quartararo tallies up his fourth win ahead of a disgruntled Vinales, whose impending Yamaha exit looms. Mir returns to the podium in third, but his title challenge is already on the rocks. Marquez rises from last to seventh.

Styrian GP

- 1 Jorge Martin
- 2 Joan Mir
- 3 Fabio Quartararo

Pramac Ducati rookie Martin claims a second pole and calmly leads the field to a maiden MotoGP win, while Vinales makes his last Yamaha appearance before his sensational suspension and subsequent ousting weeks later.

Austrian GP

- 1 Brad Binder
- 2 Francesco Bagnaia
- 3 Jorge Martin

Binder gambles on slicks as late rainfall soaks the Red Bull Ring to claim a heroic home win for KTM. Bagnaia and Martin trail him after switching to wets, while Marquez crashes out of a potential winning situation.

British GP

- 1 Fabio Quartararo
- 2 Alex Rins
- 3 Aleix Espargaro

Quartararo dominates to claim his fifth win of a season that he is now looking unlikely to lose. Rins takes his only podium of the year in second ahead of an historic third for the Aprilia of Espargaro.

sidelines following a career-threatening arm break at the Spanish GP, he made an emotional return at the third round of 2021 in Portugal – three surgeries later and with a right shoulder severely lacking in strength. Marquez scored Honda's best result of the season straight away with seventh, but there was no hope of a resurgent title challenge. The limitations in his right shoulder hampered him at clockwise circuits, while it shackled his otherworldly ability to wrestle the difficult Honda into submission. The was evident when he crashed out of four races. But when Marquez got to anti-clockwise venues, flashes of the 'old' six-time MotoGP world champion emerged. He won at the Sachsenring to keep his unbeaten grand prix streak at the German track intact, narrowly missed out on the win at Motorland Aragon to Bagnaia,

“MOTOGP’S FUTURE WITHOUT ROSSI IS ONE THAT HAS BEEN PONDERED FOR A WHILE”

and dominated at the Circuit of The Americas. A win at the Emilia Romagna GP on the clockwise Misano also heralded positive signs in his recovery and for Honda's desire to win championships again.

But once again uncertainty hangs over Marquez and Honda heading to 2022. A training incident ahead of the final two races resulted in a return of the vision issues he suffered in 2011. No one is sure what the outcome will be, but the ramifications of a further Marquez absence won't only come as a major blow to Honda, which ended 2021 with the Spaniard as its top runner, despite him missing



Miller took back-to-back wins for Ducati at Jerez and here at Le Mans



Mir failed to win during title defence despite extracting all his Suzuki could offer

four races. A missing Marquez would also hit MotoGP itself, because its biggest star is bowing out – after 432 grands prix, 26 seasons, 115 total grand prix wins and nine world championships (seven in the premier class), Rossi will not be present at the start of a new season for the first time since 1999. The results required in 2021 for him to continue never materialised. That wasn't because he had lost any of his speed, the Italian regularly lapping circuits faster than he ever had, but the ultra-competitive nature of MotoGP meant a matter of tenths was the difference between finishing in the top 10 or out of the points. Michelin's tendency for constructing rear tyres from a softer casing than the Bridgestones of pre-2016 also worked against Rossi and have done for a while.

None of that robbed the 42-year-old of his fight. He rode, as Morbidelli put it, in an “unattackable” fashion in his final race at Valencia, lapping at podium pace to end his time in MotoGP arguably still as one of the top 10 riders in the world.

MotoGP's future without Rossi is one that has been pondered for a while, but his legacy will live on in numerous ways, not least through 2021's leading riders. Both Quartararo and VR46 protege Bagnaia grew up on the legend of Rossi, and their successes in many ways are owed to him. Quartararo can trace his title success back to Rossi's revival of Yamaha in the early 2000s, while Bagnaia has inherited Ducati's most competitive machinery – something made possible by the mistakes Ducati learned from its 2011-12 disaster with 'the Doctor', who moulded his grand prix career.

That both will likely engage in one of MotoGP's most mouthwatering championship duels since Rossi's own legendary rivalries is a fitting way to carry on the icon's legacy as the series fully undergoes a changing of the guard. ❧

➔ P38 VALENTINO ROSSI'S GREATEST RACES

ROUND BY ROUND

Aragon GP

1 Francesco Bagnaia

2 Marc Marquez

3 Joan Mir

Bagnaia fends off a race-long charge from Marquez to secure his first win in MotoGP. Tyre issues drop Quartararo to eighth, while Vinales makes his debut as an Aprilia rider. Mir completes the podium.

San Marino GP

1 Francesco Bagnaia

2 Fabio Quartararo

3 Enea Bastianini

Polesitter Bagnaia resists a late charge from Quartararo to win. Avintia rookie Bastianini blasts through the field from 12th on the grid to take third. Dovizioso returns to MotoGP with SRT as Morbidelli moves to Yamaha.

Americas GP

1 Marc Marquez

2 Fabio Quartararo

3 Francesco Bagnaia

Marquez dominates for Honda to take his second win of 2021. Quartararo crucially beats Bagnaia to second to put one hand on the title. Weekend is overshadowed by fears over track safety due to aggressive surface bumps.

Emilia Romagna GP

1 Marc Marquez

2 Pol Espargaro

3 Enea Bastianini

Quartararo starts 15th, while Bagnaia fends off Marquez for much of the race to keep his title hopes alive. But a late crash for Bagnaia crowns Quartararo as world champion. Marquez leads Honda 1-2 from Espargaro.

Algarve GP

1 Francesco Bagnaia

2 Joan Mir

3 Jack Miller

Bagnaia takes a third win of the season as Quartararo gets stuck behind faster Ducatis after a poor qualifying, and crashes out for the first time in 2021. Mir and Miller complete the podium, with Marquez ruled out with vision problems.

Valencia GP

1 Francesco Bagnaia

2 Jorge Martin

3 Jack Miller

Bagnaia ends campaign with fourth win from Martin and Miller to head Ducati's first 1-2-3 in MotoGP. Quartararo is fifth. Rossi finishes his last-ever grand prix in 10th to bring his illustrious 26-season career to an emotional close.

AUTOSPORT'S TOP 10 RIDERS



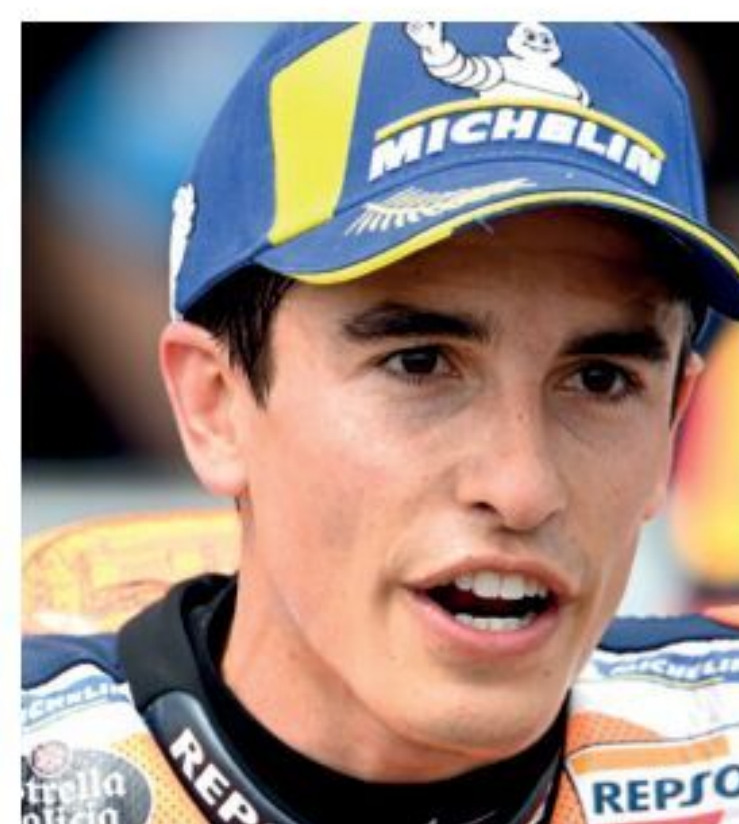
FABIO QUARTARARO

1 There's little doubting his credentials as 2021's number one. Not only did he win the most races and the championship in dominant fashion, but what set him above the rest was how he rebuilt himself into a weapon after his disastrous 2020.



FRANCESCO BAGNAIA

2 Had it not been for his mild early-season wobble, he could well have become Ducati's first world champion since 2007. Another to remould himself after a tricky 2020, he has arguably become the most rounded rider on the grid.



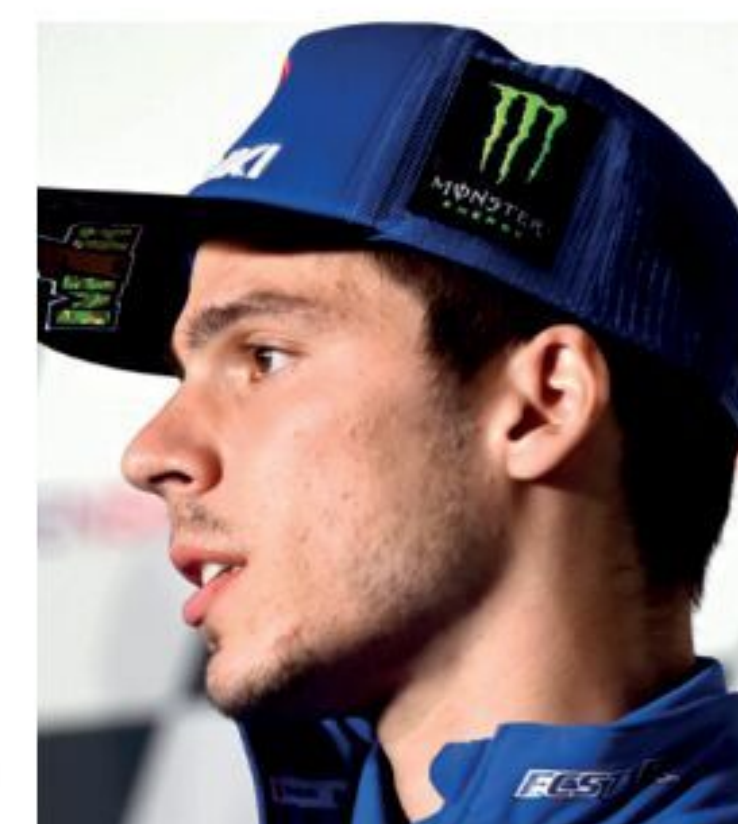
MARC MARQUEZ

3 His return to MotoGP in 2021 was a most welcome sight. Clearly still some way off his old self, but his three victories proved he could still ride – and do so better than most. Let's hope 2021 wasn't his last dance.



JACK MILLER

4 Copped some criticism for a poor start to 2021, but back-to-back victories in Spain and France vindicated Ducati's decision to promote him. He needs to eradicate his inconsistent form in 2022 if he wants to keep the factory ride.



JOAN MIR

5 The 2020 world champion's title defence was a sadly meek affair, but he made the best of the underwhelming Suzuki package to at least show everyone he was riding better than he ever did during his championship year.



ENEA BASTIANINI

6 Quick adaptation from Moto3 to Moto2 carried over into his first MotoGP season. Demonstrated superb racecraft on his two-year-old Ducati and, once he figures out qualifying, the Italian will be making many a visit to a MotoGP podium.



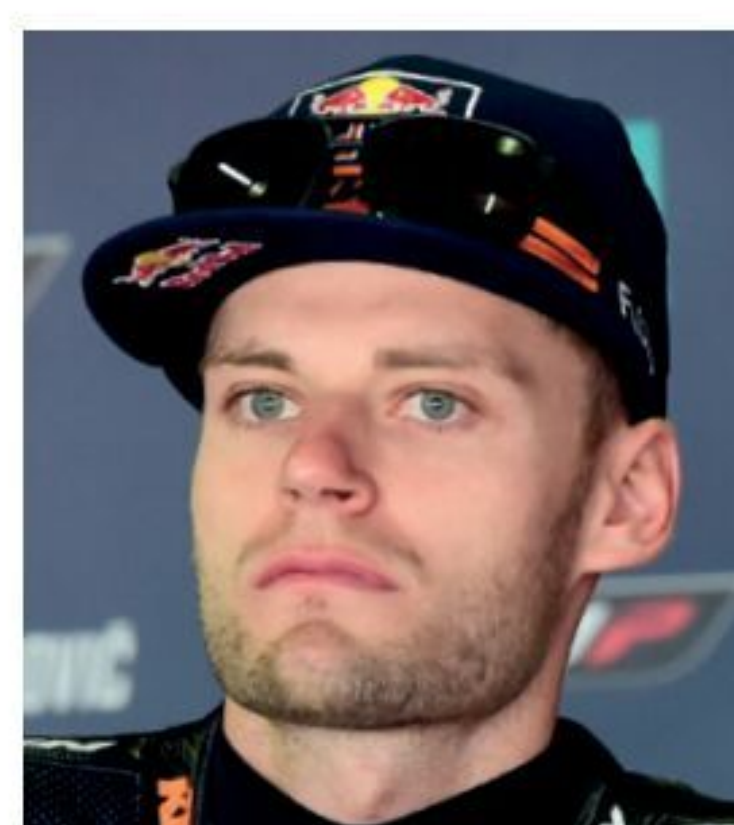
JORGE MARTIN

7 Stunning from the off on his factory-backed Pramac Ducati, he may well have claimed more than just the one win in his rookie season had it not been for the awful Portugal crash that set his campaign back considerably.



ALEIX ESPARGARO

8 Radically overhauled Aprilia package allowed him to be a regular top-eight contender for much of the season, while his historic British GP podium was further proof of the underrated Spaniard's class in motorcycle racing's top division.



BRAD BINDER

9 The KTM may not have taken the step forward it should have, but he regularly overturned poor qualifying results to salvage good points on Sundays. Also, his heroic slicks-on-a-wet-track Austrian GP win makes him a worthy top 10 rider.



MIGUEL OLIVEIRA

10 Difficulties with the KTM package and late-season injury plagued one of 2020's top performers. But when the RC16 briefly worked late in the first half, he used it to remind the paddock why KTM continues to back him.

RIDERS' CHAMPIONSHIP

POS	RIDER	TEAM/BIKE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	PTS
1	Fabio Quartararo (FRA)	Yamaha	5	1	1	13	3	1	6	3	1	3	7	1	8	2	2	4	R	5	278
2	Francesco Bagnaia (ITA)	Ducati	3	6	2	2	4	R	7	5	6	11	2	14	1	1	3	R	1	1	252
3	Joan Mir (ESP)	Suzuki	4	7	3	5	R	3	4	9	3	2	4	9	3	6	8	R	2	4	208
4	Jack Miller (AUS)	Ducati	9	9	R	1	1	6	3	6	R	R	11	4	5	5	7	R	3	3	181
5	Johann Zarco (FRA)	Pramac Ducati	2	2	R	8	2	4	2	8	4	6	R	11	17	12	R	5	5	6	173
6	Brad Binder (ZAF)	KTM	14	8	5	R	13	5	8	4	12	4	1	6	7	9	9	11	10	7	151
7	Marc Marquez (ESP)	Honda	-	-	7	9	R	R	R	1	7	8	15	R	2	4	1	1	-	-	142
8	Aleix Espargaro (ESP)	Aprilia	7	10	6	6	R	7	R	7	8	R	10	3	4	8	R	7	R	9	120
9	Jorge Martin (ESP)	Pramac Ducati	15	3	NS	-	-	-	14	12	R	1	3	R	9	R	5	R	7	2	111
10	Maverick Vinales (ESP)	Yamaha/Aprilia	1	5	11	7	10	8	5	19	2	NC	-	-	18	13	-	8	16	16	106

11 Enea Bastianini (VR46 Ducati) 102; 12 Pol Espargaro (Honda) 100; 13 Alex Rins (Suzuki) 99; 14 Miguel Oliveira (KTM) 94; 15 Takaaki Nakagami (LCR Honda) 76; 16 Alex Marquez (LCR Honda) 70; 17 Franco Morbidelli (SRT Yamaha/Yamaha) 47; 18 Valentino Rossi (SRT Yamaha) 44; 19 Luca Marini (VR46 Ducati) 41; 20 Iker Lecuona (Tech3 KTM) 39; 21 Danilo Petrucci (Tech3 KTM) 37; 22 Stefan Bradl (Honda) 14; 23 Michele Pirro (Pramac Ducati/Ducati) 12; 24 Andrea Dovizioso (SRT Yamaha) 12; 25 Dani Pedrosa (KTM) 6; 26 Lorenzo Savadori (Aprilia) 4; 27 Tito Rabat (Pramac Ducati) 1; 28 Cal Crutchlow (SRT Yamaha/Yamaha) 0; 29 Garrett Gerloff (SRT Yamaha) 0; 30 Jake Dixon (SRT Yamaha) 0.

VALENTINO ROSSI's

10 GREATEST RACES

The Italian legend has finally retired from MotoGP after a remarkable career. Autosport picks out his finest rides

LEWIS DUNCAN

PHOTOGRAPHY GOLD AND GOOSE  **motorsport**
IMAGES



2000 BRITISH GP

DONINGTON PARK
HONDA NSR500 (1st)

10

Rossi had blazed a trail through the 125cc and 250cc classes in the late 1990s, winning titles in both, before he made his top-tier

debut in 2000 with the factory-backed Nastro Azzurro Honda squad on the snarling NSR500.

Speed was not in short supply for the then-21-year-old, with Rossi scoring three podiums in the first eight races. But consistency was the main issue, Rossi crashing out of the opening two rounds and scoring 11th, 12th and sixth-place results in Japan, Italy and the Netherlands respectively.

After qualifying fourth at a wet Donington Park, Rossi was almost flicked

from his Honda at the start and plummeted to 13th by the first corner. But, showing the wet-weather prowess that would follow him throughout his MotoGP days, Rossi steadily climbed his way back into the podium positions by the end of lap 14 of 30.

And his march continued, Rossi taking the lead from Jeremy McWilliams at the Melbourne hairpin with just over three laps to go. McWilliams on the Aprilia and Suzuki's Kenny Roberts Jr, who would win the title that year, kept Rossi in check as he scrabbled for grip on the drying track. But Rossi took the chequered flag 0.395 seconds ahead of Roberts to claim the first of his 89 premier class victories and begin his journey towards becoming a motorsport legend.



STATS

500cc/MOTOGP

STARTS: 372

WINS: 89

POLES: 55

FASTEST LAPS: 76

POINTS: 5415

TITLES: 7

(2001-05, 2008-09)

2015 DUTCH TT

ASSEN

YAMAHA YZR-M1 (1st)

9

Rossi had a real love affair with Assen, scoring eight wins at the Dutch TT venue in his top-class career. It was the scene of an important comeback victory in 2013

after two miserable seasons at Ducati in 2011 and 2012, and it would ultimately play host to his last win in 2017.

In 2015, Rossi – now 15 seasons into his grand prix career – was at his best level since his title-winning glory years of the 2000s. He had won twice and stood on the podium at every round up to Assen, and led Yamaha team-mate Jorge Lorenzo by one point when they arrived in the Netherlands to continue one of the most enthralling MotoGP title battles of all time.

But it would be Marc Marquez, with whom he'd had a collision on the final lap on his way to victory in Argentina earlier in the year, who



Rossi's illustrious career spans 125cc and 250cc crowns and seven titles at the top level



Rossi battled with at Assen.

The pair ran 1-2 after the first lap and duelled for the entire race. Rossi led onto the final lap, with Marquez launching his Honda up the inside of the Yamaha into the final chicane in a last-gasp bid to snatch victory.

The pair made slight contact, Rossi sent through the chicane's gravel trap. He emerged on the other side still in the lead and took the chequered flag. It would only serve to deepen tensions between Rossi and Marquez, but at the time Rossi was showing he'd lost none of his guile in combat.

2005 BRITISH GP

DONINGTON PARK

YAMAHA YZR-M1 (1st)

8

The 2005 season proved to be one of Rossi's most dominant campaigns in MotoGP. Now in his second season with Yamaha, he started it off with a win in the opening round at Jerez following a controversial clash with Sete Gibernau, finished second in Portugal, then won five on the bounce from the Chinese GP to the Dutch TT before finishing third at Laguna Seca.

MotoGP's summertime return to Britain and Donington could well have ended that podium streak, as miserably heavy rain lashed the circuit and left rivers of standing water.

The 29-lap British GP proved to be a race of survival as 11 of the 21 starters crashed out. Rossi himself got a poor launch from pole and dropped briefly to seventh. But



on lap four he got himself back to the head of the pack, before a huge slide at Redgate on the following tour forced him into another fightback. He made several more mistakes in a race that would likely never have gone ahead nowadays.

Despite his many moments, Rossi's otherworldly talent on a motorcycle propelled him back into the lead and onto a dominant victory in what he described at the time as "my hardest race".

2005 SPANISH GP

JEREZ

YAMAHA YZR-M1 (1st)

7

Rossi was the all-conquering force of MotoGP's first half of the 2000s, the Italian four times a world champion on Honda

and Yamaha machinery. And his rivalries were fierce, most notably with Max Biaggi and Sete Gibernau.

Rossi came into the 2005 season as the reigning four-time champion, having transformed Yamaha back into a title-winning force during the previous year.

Gibernau – runner-up the previous two seasons – was quick on the Gresini-run Honda, and in the opening round of the 2005 campaign at Jerez the pair had in their most famous clash.

Rossi started from pole, but a crash in morning warm-up meant he had to race his number two bike. Off the line Gibernau grabbed the lead and held station until the end of lap 25, when Rossi came through at the final corner.

The Yamaha rider made a mistake into the Dry Sac hairpin on the last tour, however, allowing Gibernau to pull back alongside and jam his Honda around the outside of the Turn 7 left-hander. Rossi tried and failed to retake the lead through the penultimate corner.

Launching one last raid, Rossi came up the inside of Gibernau at the final corner and punted the Spaniard off track to claim victory number 43 in the premier class.

Gibernau was furious about the clash and feels even to this day that it set a negative precedent. But it only solidified the ruthlessness that would carry Rossi to three more championships.



2013 DUTCH TT

ASSEN

YAMAHA YZR-M1 (1st)

6

Rossi's spell with Ducati in 2011 and 2012 almost brought his career to an ignominious end, with the difficult Desmosedici allowing him to yield

just three podiums across the two seasons.

As Ben Spies, his replacement at Yamaha, struggled for form in 2012, an opening for an unlikely return 'home' appeared. Rossi duly signed for 2013 to begin his second spell with Yamaha, although it was questioned whether he did so with tail between his legs or bit between his teeth after the misery of his Ducati tenure.

Rossi scored second in the opening Qatar

GP, but wouldn't stand on a podium again during the next five races, raising further questions about whether he was past it.

At Assen Rossi started fourth, and picked his way past Honda trio Stefan Bradl, Marc Marquez and Dani Pedrosa to take the lead inside the first six laps in a display that almost eradicated the memory of his Ducati years.

From then on he eased away from the pack, emerging victorious by 2.170s to take his first win since the 2010 Malaysian GP.

He wouldn't win again that season, but the point had very much been proven: Rossi was far from past his best, and ultimately Assen 2013 would serve to be the stepping stone to a full-blown title tilt in 2015.





2004 SOUTH AFRICAN GP

WELKOM
YAMAHA YZR-M1 (1st)

5

The Honda/Rossi combination of the first two years of the MotoGP era in 2002 and 2003 had been absolute in its domination of the class.

But a divide emerged between Rossi and HRC during 2003 – his third title-winning campaign at the sport's pinnacle – with the Italian unhappy that his contributions to Honda's dominance were seemingly being put second to that of the V5-powered RC211V.

Mired in a title drought dating back to Wayne Rainey in 1992 and enduring a winless 2003, Yamaha pulled off a coup – orchestrated by then-team boss Davide Brivio – in getting Rossi to agree to join the Japanese marque for 2004.

History shows that it would be the best decision of Rossi's career, but it was a major risk at the time, with Honda holding Rossi right to the end of his contract to stop him testing the M1 ahead of 2004. But those fears were assuaged at the opening round of the

campaign at Welkom in South Africa.

Rossi led early on from pole before being overtaken by arch rival Max Biaggi, who was on a Honda. The pair locked horns up to the last lap, with Rossi getting the better of Biaggi by 0.210s.

Rossi became the first rider to win the last race of a season and the first of the following year with different manufacturers, and his celebration – when he knelt in front of the M1 – has become one of his most iconic. It would begin the most successful spell of his career.



2001 AUSTRALIAN GP

PHILLIP ISLAND
HONDA NSR500 (1st)

4

Rossi became the title challenger everyone expected him to be in 2001, the final season of

the 500cc two-stroke machines. He won 11 of the 16 races as he romped to his first world crown.

That year also saw the blossoming of his bitter rivalry with Max Biaggi, the pair having major clashes on track at Suzuka and Barcelona, with the latter spilling over into a physical altercation post-race.

Arriving at Phillip Island, Biaggi required a big result if he was to keep his slim title hopes alive, while Rossi simply needed to keep him just in sight to seal the deal.

What erupted was a furious

multi-rider battle for victory that included Rossi, Biaggi, Loris Capirossi, Alex Barros, Noriyuki Haga and Olivier Jacque and raged through to the closing stages.

When Biaggi hit the front late on, Rossi tried to bolt with him. It was unnecessary in the grand scheme of things, but it showed how unwilling Rossi was to simply settle – the defeat of his rivals had to be absolute.

Rossi pulled off a daring raid on Biaggi at Turn 10, three corners from the finish, and held on for victory by 0.013s.

It was a race that displayed all of Rossi's speed and, perhaps more importantly, his ruthlessness. And it marked the start of what was to follow over the next two decades.



2008 UNITED STATES GP

LAGUNA SECA
YAMAHA YZR-M1 (1st)

3

The late 2000s brought some of Rossi's toughest opponents in MotoGP, which in turn led to some of his most memorable races.

Casey Stoner was one such rival. The Australian made waves in his rookie season in 2006 with his speed, and stunned a year later when he dominated the campaign on the factory Ducati to win the world title.

Rossi had won three times in 2008 on the

Yamaha ahead of the US GP at Laguna Seca, while Stoner was on four, including the three races prior to the Californian round. He was still 20 points adrift of Rossi in the standings, but a dominant pole by over four tenths against Rossi at Laguna gave the impression that the championship gap would reduce further.

Rossi took the lead on the opening lap at the Corkscrew, before Stoner stalked and then pounced on him into Turn 2 on lap four of 32.

The pair battled hard over that lap, Rossi getting back ahead at Turn 5 before Stoner scythed past on the outside of the Rahal straight. Rossi then pulled off his famous Corkscrew overtake, launching it up the inside of Stoner and taking the lead despite touching the gravel on the inside.

The pair traded places again on the following tour, but Rossi had the upper hand and fended off Stoner's subsequent attacks until the Ducati rider crashed at the last corner with nine laps to go, leaving Rossi to claim victory.



2003 AUSTRALIAN GP

PHILLIP ISLAND
HONDA RC211V (1st)

2

Glance at the results sheet for the 2003 Australian Grand Prix and you'll see what appears to be a fairly dominant display from Rossi, winning by 5.2s from Ducati's Loris Capirossi. What it doesn't show is how utterly crushing Rossi was that day at Phillip Island on his V5 Repsol Honda.

That year's championship had already been wrapped up at the previous round in Malaysia courtesy of Rossi's seventh win of his final campaign with Honda.

He made a sluggish start from pole in Australia, but Rossi fought back into the podium places

in the opening laps. Then a pass on Marco Melandri into the Honda hairpin on lap five of 27, while yellow flags were being waved for Troy Bayliss's crash on the previous tour, resulted in a 10s penalty for Rossi. He took the lead at the end of that lap, and had opened up an advantage of over two seconds by the time he was informed of the penalty.

What followed was arguably the classiest ride of his career, Rossi reeling off qualifying lap after qualifying lap to negate the penalty.

He crossed the finish line 15.2s clear of the field to seal his eighth win of the year and possibly his best with Honda.



2009 CATALAN GP

BARCELONA
YAMAHA YZR-M1 (1ST)

1

Ask any MotoGP fan what's the best race they've ever seen and most will say Barcelona 2009. It's certainly Rossi's most memorable victory

– he snatched a vital win at the last corner from Yamaha team-mate Jorge Lorenzo on his way to that year's title.

By 2009 the Rossi/Lorenzo relationship had kicked into a new gear of tension, with Lorenzo viewed by Yamaha as its future while Rossi toyed with the idea of a switch to Formula 1.

Coming into the Catalan GP, Lorenzo – in his second season – had won twice to his Yamaha stablemate's one. They qualified 1-2, Lorenzo outpacing Rossi by 0.013s, and the pair engaged in their greatest duel that raged to the final lap.

Lorenzo held the lead exiting Turn 10



after retaliating against a Rossi assault. Conventional wisdom was that the rider in the lead exiting Turn 10 would win the race. But conventional wisdom didn't apply to Rossi at the peak of his powers. He launched his M1 up the inside of Lorenzo into the final corner, and emerged ahead to win by 0.095s.

It represented a turning point in the 2009 season, with Rossi going on to win four more times to Lorenzo's two and wrapping up a seventh title with a round to spare.

But it also proved to the world that no matter how far into his career he would go and what would happen next, Rossi truly was magic.

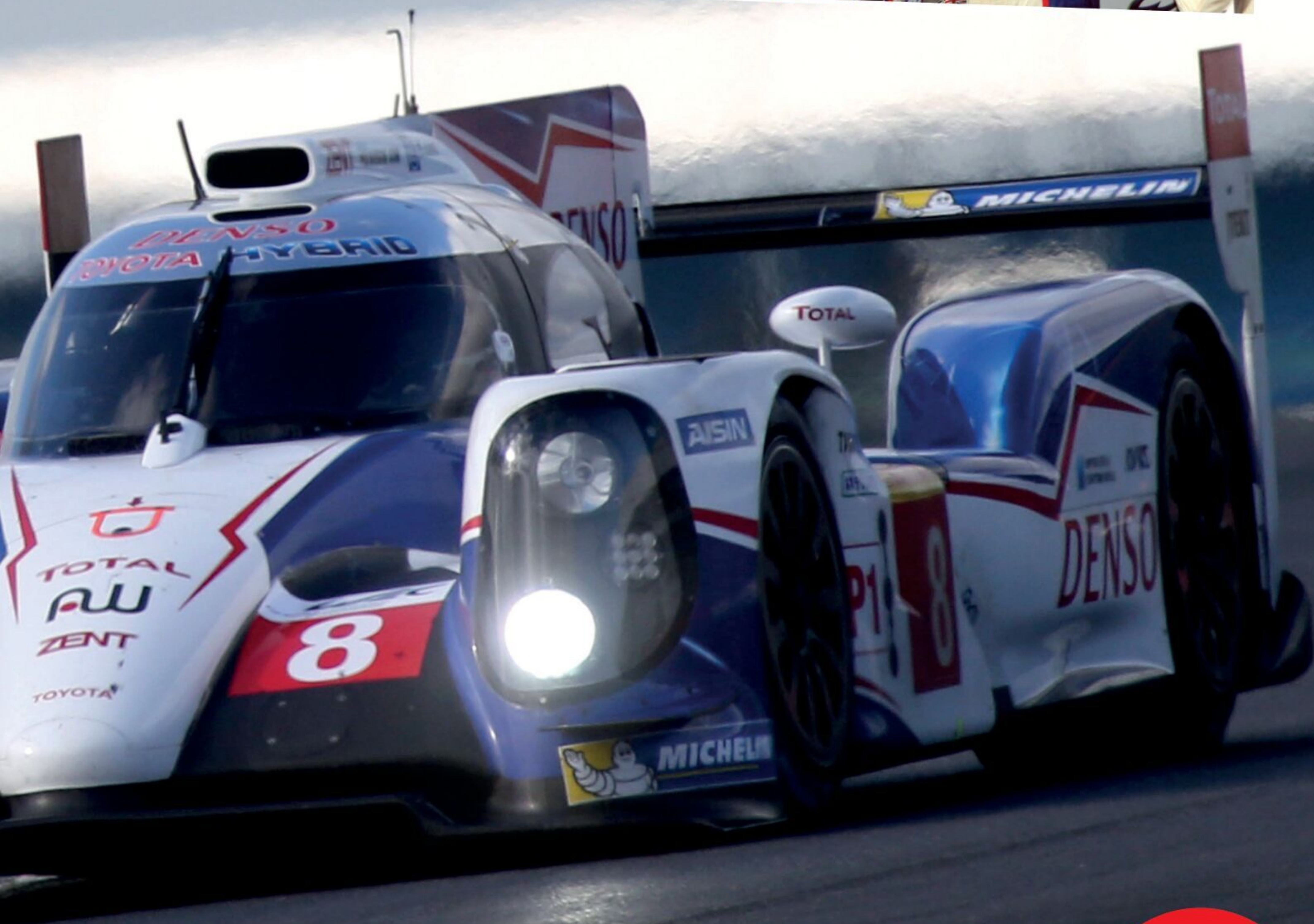
SATISFACTION OVER PERCEPTION

*He never won Le Mans, and his F1 career should have been longer.
But Anthony Davidson – who has just retired – did claim a WEC title,
and besides he always set more store by his own performances*

GARY WATKINS

PHOTOGRAPHY  **motorsport**
IMAGES





On way to win
in Silverstone WEC
season opener in 2014.
Inset: Davidson and
Buemi won
the title

JEP

A love affair started at Paul Ricard late in 2008. Anthony Davidson got behind the wheel of a prototype for the first time — Peugeot's 908 HDi turbodiesel LMP1 — and was smitten. The love turned out to be unrequited, at least initially. But when it was belatedly returned, the Brit kicked on with a sportscar career that earned him the right to call himself a world champion. That's not to forget a total of 14 big wins, the Sebring 12 Hours included, across multiple series during eight seasons with Peugeot and then Toyota.

"I remember driving that car for the first time at Ricard and falling in love with it and LMP1," recalls Davidson just a couple of weeks after calling time on his professional racing career. "I just loved it, it really suited my style and I was quick in it. Sometimes you just click with a racing car; it was like an extension of my body."

Yet Davidson didn't get the opportunity to race the 908 the following year. His chances were undone by a change of top brass at Peugeot Sport. He had a draft contract — in French — but the place earmarked for him in a three-car team at the Le Mans 24 Hours was taken by David Brabham.

Davidson was adamant that LMP1 was his future after his brief two-day flirtation with the category in the south of France. That explains how he ended up in one of the Lola-based Aston Martin coupes fielded by the Prodrive-run factory squad at Le Mans in 2009. Prodrive boss David Richards was well known to him after his short stint as team principal of the British American Racing Formula 1 squad while Davidson was on its books as a test driver. "I didn't get the Peugeot drive, but I thought, 'Hang on a minute, these cars are brilliant fun,'" recalls the 42-year-old. "I'd better get my myself into one."

The chance to race full-time in the category came late. It was already February 2010 when Davidson was contacted again by Peugeot and ended up contesting five races that year, including Le Mans. Within weeks of the call (see panel, right), he was racing at Sebring, claiming the win with Alex Wurz and Marc Gene.

Davidson feels privileged to have raced through what he correctly calls "a golden era" for the top-flight of sportscars with Peugeot and then, after the French marque's withdrawal on the eve of the rebirth of the World Endurance Championship in 2012, with Toyota. He was quickly picked up by the Japanese manufacturer when it expanded its programme to fill the void left by his former employer. "I feel lucky in that respect because the cars were amazing and the competition with Audi and Porsche was fierce," he says. "LMP1 also gave me the opportunity to show what I always knew I could do, what I believe I had been doing in F1, but maybe the big wide world didn't always see or appreciate."

Davidson's P1 successes included the WEC title in 2014, that Sebring win in the American Le Mans Series in 2010, four wins in the Intercontinental Le Mans Cup that segued into the WEC, and

"I DON'T HAVE THE TROPHY AT HOME, BUT IN MY MIND I WON THAT RACE IN TERMS OF THE JOB I DID"

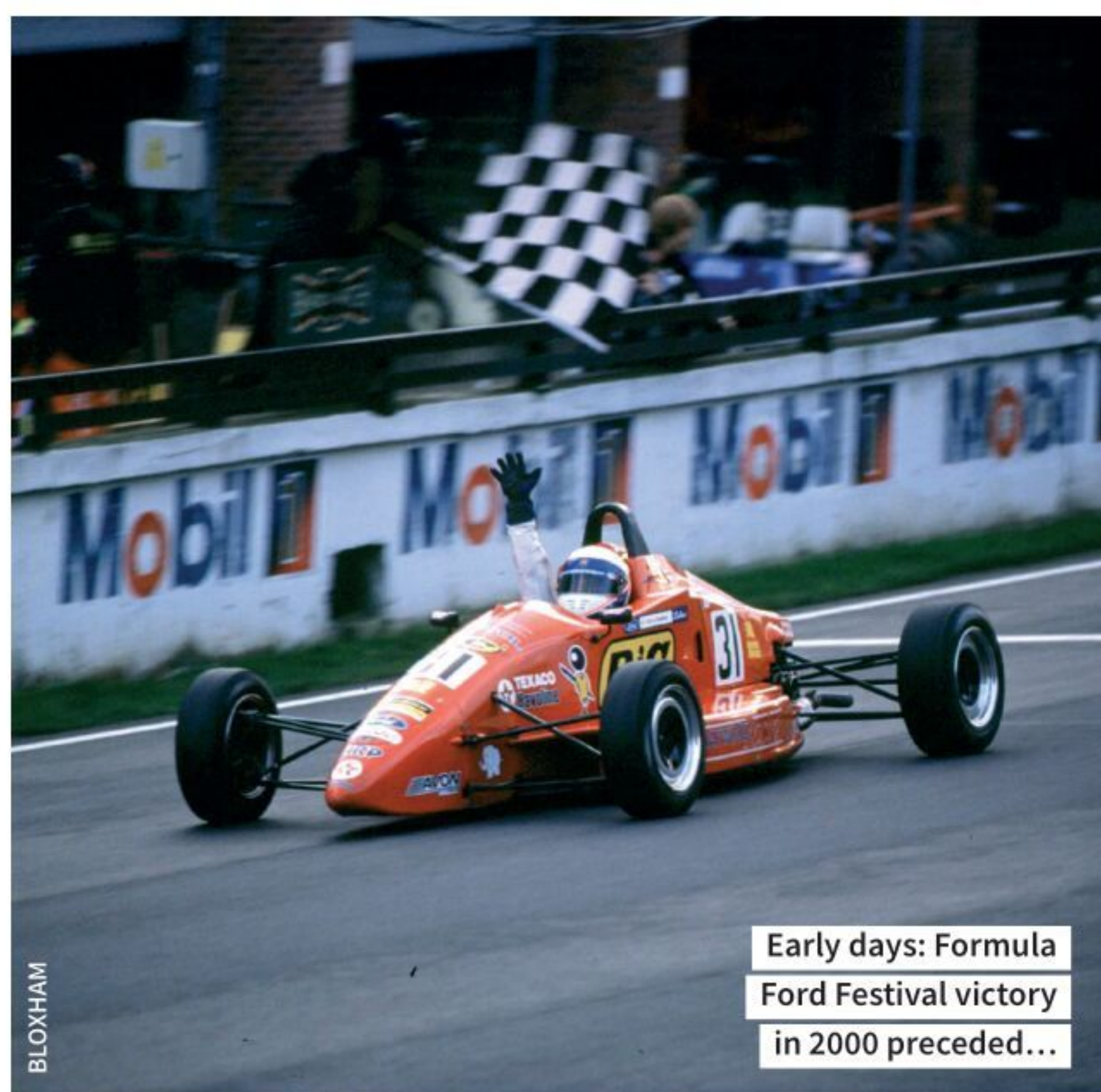
then nine in the world championship itself. He doesn't include the rain-shortened Fuji 6 Hours in 2017 when he didn't get behind the wheel, though was still awarded points.

What he didn't do, however, was win Le Mans. He fell six minutes short in that aim. Together with Sebastien Buemi and Kazuki Nakajima, he was on course for victory in 2016 when an engine issue robbed the car of power with a lap and a half to go. They weren't even classified after the ailing Toyota TS050 HYBRID completed the final lap outside of the minimum required by the rules.

Davidson has come to terms with that loss. In fact, he's now entirely at ease with it. "It was heartbreaking at the time, one of the lowest moments of my career," he says. "I don't have the trophy at home, but in my mind I won that race in terms of the job I did. It was one of the best drives of my career: I was flying, made no mistakes and helped get us into a position >>



After Peugeot letdown, first LMP1 action came with Aston in 2009



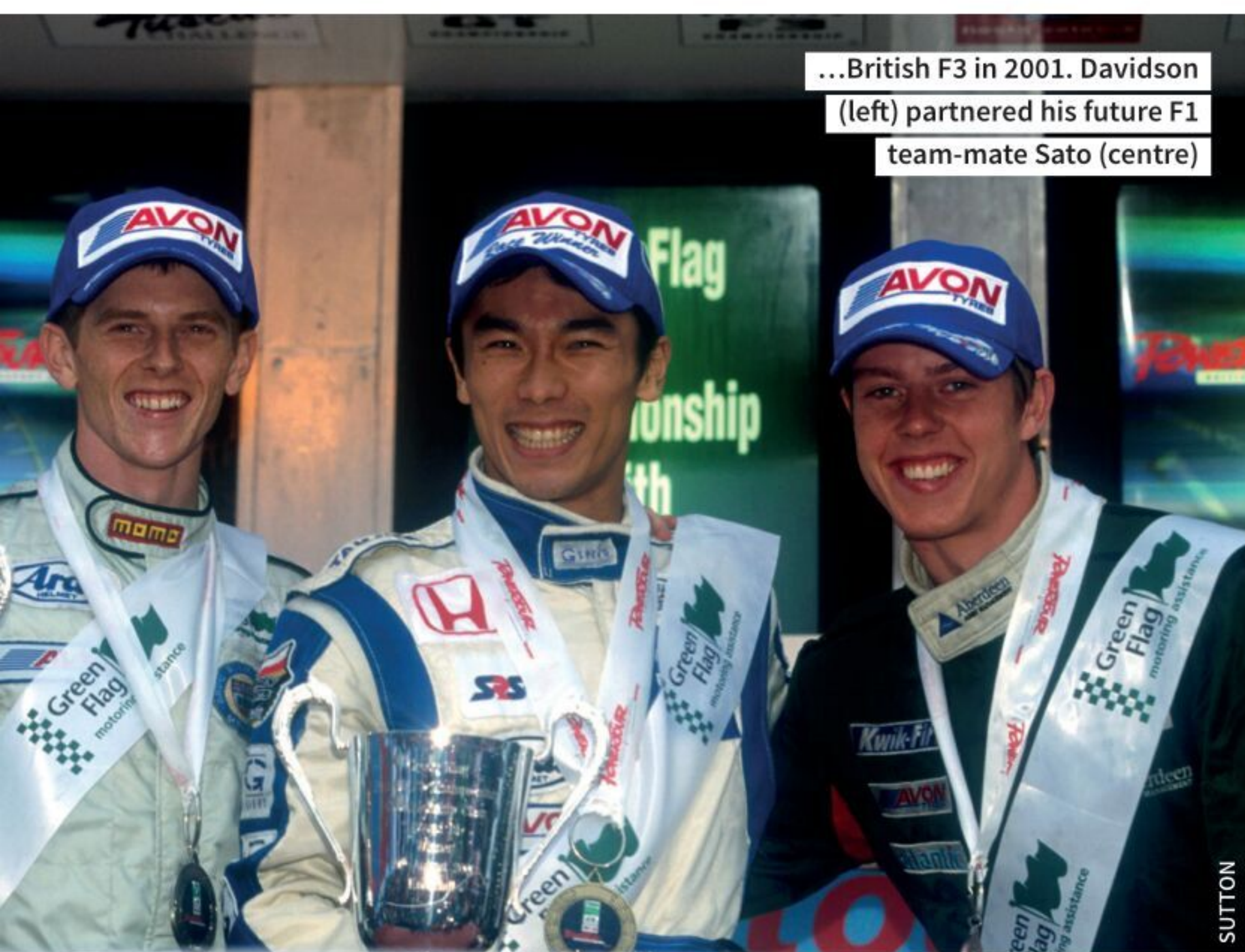
Early days: Formula Ford Festival victory in 2000 preceded...



First time out for Peugeot, Davidson won 2010 Sebring 12H



WOOD



...British F3 in 2001. Davidson (left) partnered his future F1 team-mate Sato (centre)

SUTTON



GIBSON

A CALL FROM OUT OF THE BLUE



J BLOXHAM

There wasn't much on the horizon for Anthony Davidson during the winter of 2009-10. He'd been test and reserve driver for Brawn Grand Prix in 2009, but only ever got to drive the world championship-winning BGP 001 in a straight line and in some demo runs. He was, he says, at his "lowest-ever ebb". Then came a phone call out of the blue on a Sunday.

"I was actually driving back from my brother's wedding and a call came in from a French number," he recalls. "I had a feeling I had to take it. There was a petrol station just coming up, so I swung in, pulled on the handbrake and answered."

The voice on the other end was Sven Smeets, Peugeot Sports' team manager. He asked whether Davidson would be able to meet him and racing boss Olivier Quesnel to talk about LMP1.

"I said, 'Where and whenever? I'll be there.' A couple of days later I met them in Paris. I booked my own flight, flew over there and tried not to trouble them with anything. I thought, 'Right, you're going to show them commitment, commitment, commitment, and prove you're not a hassle to work with'.

"I told them how I loved LMP1, that my ambition was to win Le Mans and that I'd love to do it with them. We were talking about a deal centred on Le Mans and there were some good signs. Sven drove me to the factory to have a look around. Then they put me in a Peugeot shirt and did a head-and-shoulders press-type shot. They told me that it was just in case and made it clear that they were talking to other people. I couldn't quite work it all out.

"Driving home after the flight back to London, the phone rings again: 'Hi, Anthony, it's Sven. Listen, things have changed.' He said it in a kind of downbeat way. I thought, 'Oh no and was ready to thump the steering wheel.' There was a little pause, and he said, 'We want you to do everything'."

That meant a full programme in the build-up to Le Mans, including the Sebring 12 Hours just a few weeks later, and then two of the three rounds of the new Intercontinental Le Mans Cup. "I remember putting the phone down and shouting, 'Yes, yes, yes!' It was one of the most amazing days of my life."

"I REMEMBER PUTTING THE PHONE DOWN AND SHOUTING, 'YES, YES, YES!'"

to win. Kazuki was cruising, bringing it home, and then there was a problem with the car. There's a sugar coating to the bitter taste it left, because I know I did such a good job."

Le Mans 2009 was arguably another one that got away. Davidson lost out to Brabham for a seat in what ended up being the winning car after Olivier Quesnel came in as the new boss of Peugeot Sport. "Quesnel wanted to put a more experienced pair of hands in, which was David," he explains. "I was gutted at the time, but they had the fastest car and needed a crew that could bring it home. Maybe that was a chance that slipped away, but it was wrong place, wrong time. Or rather right place, wrong time."

Davidson looks back on his career in terms of the performances he put in rather than the races he won. He is highly analytical of his driving and performances, critical even. How he performed, he explains, was always more important than the end result. That goes for the year of his WEC title victory alongside Buemi at the wheel of the Toyota TS040 HYBRID. "The trophy I got at the end of the year isn't what I hang my hat on," he

"I REDISCOVERED MY LOVE OF MOTORSPORT IN THE LESS-PRESSURED ENVIRONMENT OF LMP2"

says. "It's just a byproduct of the job I did over the season. There's not one race I look back on and think I didn't do a good job. Being a world champion doesn't matter at all in the way I perceive myself, though I understand that it does in the way others perceive me."

It's also why he has few regrets about his stint in F1, which spanned seven seasons, yet only 24 race starts. Davidson was a BAR-Honda test driver from 2002 until 2007, when he joined the Super Aguri B-team set up by the Japanese manufacturer for protege Takuma Sato. To the 21 grands prix he managed with Super Aguri before it folded early in 2008 can be added one with BAR in 2005 and two with Minardi in 2002. Then there were two complete seasons – 2004 and 2006 – as a Friday test driver with BAR. "I'm happy with what I did in F1, some of the performances on Fridays and certainly a lot of what we did at Super Aguri in 2007," he says. "The 2007 Super Aguri started out as a good midfield car genuinely able to fight for a top 10 or 12."

Davidson mentions qualifying 11th at the season-opening Australian Grand Prix in Melbourne aboard his Super Aguri-Honda SA07 and again for the Turkish GP at Istanbul Park later in the season as two highs of his short F1 career proper. "At Melbourne I was just a tenth or so behind Takuma in qualifying, and then in Turkey I outqualified Jenson [Button] and Rubens [Barrichello] in the works Hondas," he recalls. "I finished just behind Jenson and was really chuffed with the job I'd done. Some of the best races I ever drove didn't involve winning or even scoring points."

Again, Davidson feels lucky to have been involved in F1 at the time he was: "We had V10s and a tyre war when I started testing with the Brackley team. I was doing 15,000km a year in a really quick car. I learned so much that carried me through the rest of my career."

He also regards it as an achievement just to have made F1 given there was no family money behind him. His father, Denis, is a graphic designer who used his skills to help the likes of Martin Hines at Zip Kart to promote their companies. "My dad was pretty savvy in the way he funded my karting. He could offer to do brochures for people like Martin," explains Davidson. "He would do deals that way to help pay for my racing."

Davidson became a paid works driver for the Italian Biesse operation in 1998 and 1999 and had few thoughts about moving into single-seaters: "I didn't have any money and thought it was my destiny to remain in karting."

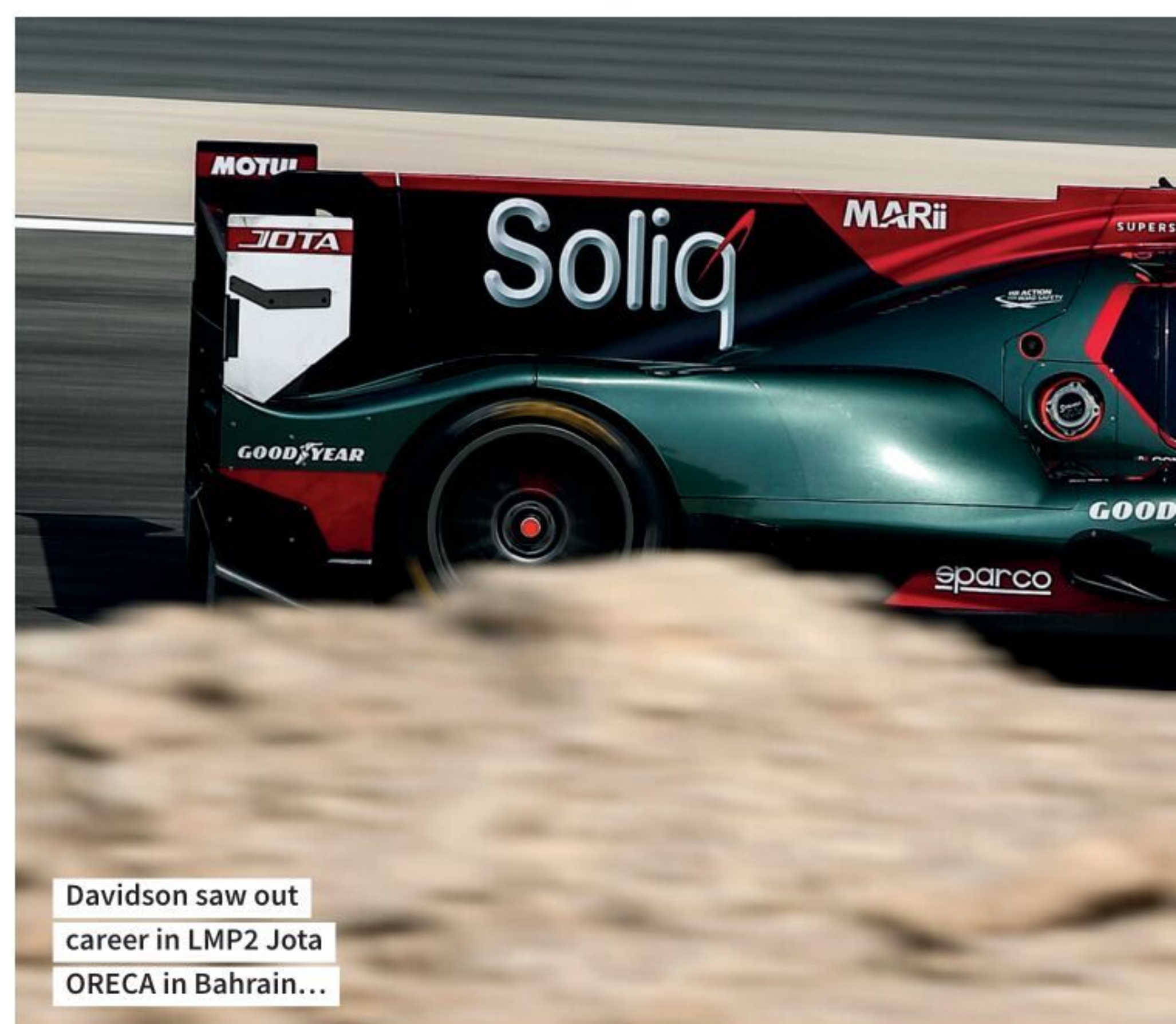
That was what he told an old karting buddy who suggested a trip to Brands Hatch in 1999 to check out the Formula Ford scene. Davidson was persuaded to go and ended up meeting "a lot of people, a lot of whom were asking for a lot of money". One person he met was Frenchman Didier Stoessel, a banker who raced for Ray in Formula Ford 1600 for fun: "Didier was already working a bit with Marcos Ambrose [then a factory Van Diemen driver] at the same time as driving for Ray. He thought he



Davidson shone in 2004 F1 FP1 runs with BAR-Honda...



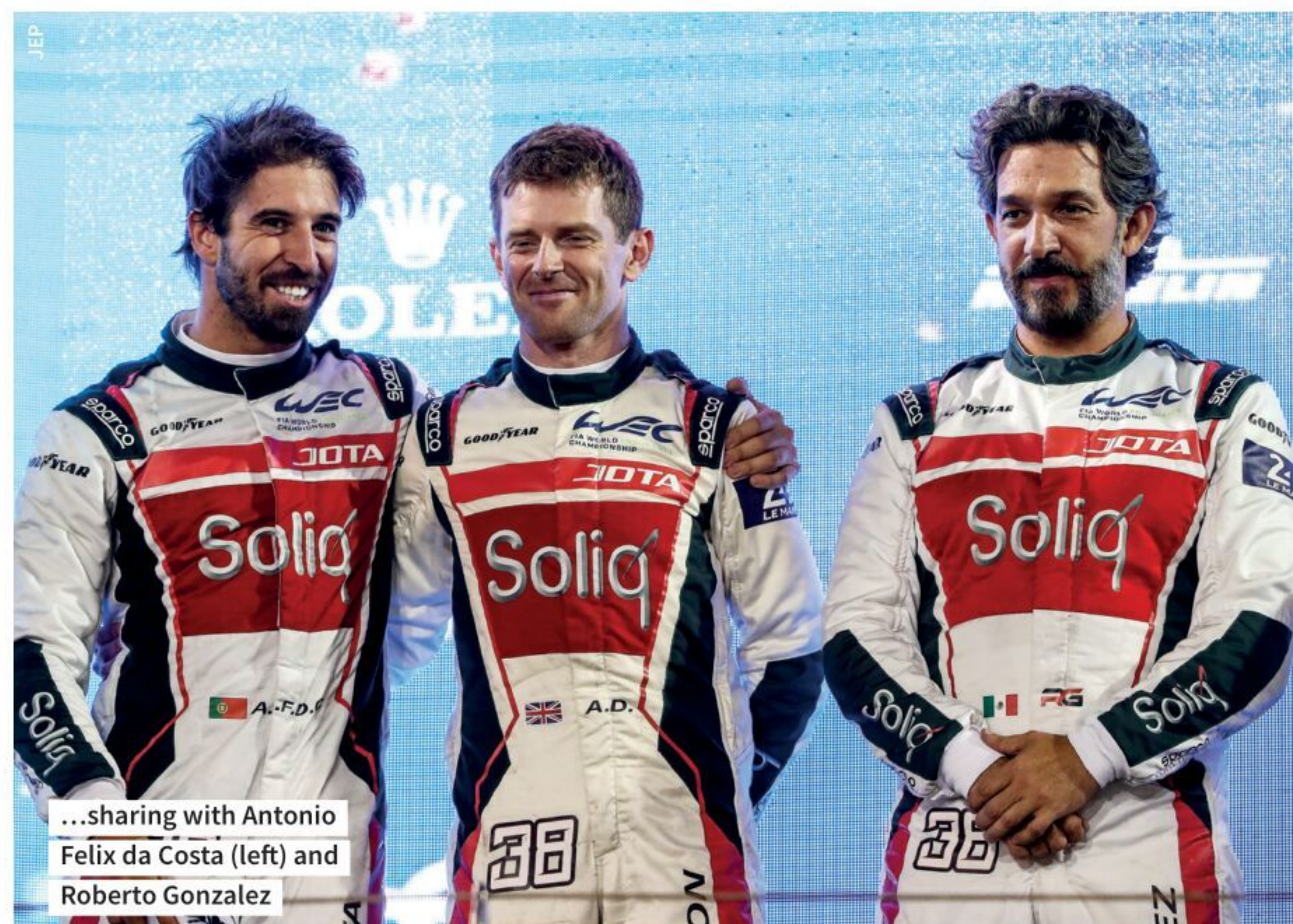
Le Mans was one that got away, none closer than 2016 heartbreak



Davidson saw out career in LMP2 Jota ORECA in Bahrain...



...and was sensational
at 2007 Turkish GP
with Super Aguri



...sharing with Antonio
Felix da Costa (left) and
Roberto Gonzalez

could go a long way with me and paid for me to race in Formula Ford and then Formula 3.”

What Stoessel didn't have was the money to take Davidson into Formula 3000 after he finished second behind Sato in a Carlin 1-2 in the 2001 British Formula 3 Championship. The Briton had already been picked up by BAR that year as part a nascent driver development programme, and from there joined its testing roster in 2002. “There wasn't really a decision not to go F3000 because we simply couldn't afford it,” explains Davidson. “Our plan was now we had a foot in the door at BAR to try to impress in that role.”

Between his final F3 start in 2001 and his first for Super Aguri in 2007, Davidson contested just four races not counting his three grand prix participations. He took part in the end-of-season Macau Guia touring car race at the wheel of a Honda Civic Type R in 2002 and three races, Le Mans included, aboard one of Prodrive's Ferrari 550 Maranello GTS racers the following year. That was the Richards link again.

Davidson reckons he should have raced more. In fact, he regards a lack of racing in that period as the only real regret of his career: “You should race because you're a racing driver and it is your passion. My advice to any young driver is that you have be racing. It's not enough to be sitting around in team kit in the hospitality drinking coffee. You've got to put your pride aside and get out there into other categories and other machinery. It will make you a better driver when you get the opportunity in the category you're aiming for. That would be my advice to my younger self. I was so adamant that I had to focus on F1. That's the thing I regret most of all, not even trying to find something else.”

Davidson's disposition towards self-criticism explains his decision to call it quits now, after two and a bit seasons – and three WEC class wins – in LMP2 with the DragonSpeed and Jota teams. He did have a plan to stop at the end of 2019, when his final deal with Toyota was due to end, but his tenure of a race seat came to an early end after he was replaced by Fernando Alonso for the 2018-19 WEC superseason.

“I've been asking a lot of myself since I started racing in Cadet karting at the age of eight, so that's 34 years,” says Davidson, who will continue his simulator role at Mercedes and F1 punditry with Sky Sports. “With a manufacturer team like Toyota that really does take its toll. I rediscovered my love of motorsport in the less-pressured environment of LMP2, but it's still wearing. I remember reading a comment from Damon Hill when he retired or was close to retirement. He said that driver talent is a bit like a tube of toothpaste: as the tube gets older, the harder you have to squeeze. It's the same with driving. It gets more difficult over time to get the most out of yourself. It's a brilliant analogy.”

“I know I'm still fast enough to get good results, to fight for wins and podiums. That's what I want to remember. I preferred to go now rather than hanging on a few years and slipping down the order. I've always been too hard on myself to let that happen.” ❧



Ehrlacher snares second WTCR crown on the spin

WORLD TOURING CAR CUP

SOCHI (RUS)

28 NOVEMBER

ROUND 8/8

Yann Ehrlacher was unruffled by the Russian rain as he secured his second consecutive World Touring Car Cup with a pair of undramatic results in fifth and sixth on the Sochi grand prix track, as Mikel Azcona and Rob Huff ended a difficult season for Zengo Motorsport's Cupras with a brace of dramatic end-of-term victories.

At just 25, Ehrlacher wrapped up his second crown in the partially reversed-grid race one, as Azcona splashed from eighth on the grid to deny Jean-Karl Vernay. The French racer made a great start from the second row to split the all-Audi front row of Gilles Magnus and Frederic Vervisch. The latter was Ehrlacher's closest challenger for

the crown, but with 36 points to make up it was always a long shot. Meanwhile, Esteban Guerrieri's bid and season came to an abrupt end when he stuck his Munnich Motorsport Honda into the wall at Turn 3.

After a safety car interlude, Vernay passed Magnus for the lead while Azcona and Huff charged into contention. It didn't end well for the Briton, who was forced out by a door-to-door collision with Vervisch, but Azcona burst through, chased down Vernay, and pulled a decisive move for the victory at Turn 2 on the last lap. Vervisch was demoted from third to sixth for starting out of position, while Ehrlacher calmly took the vital points he needed to retain his crown.

Conditions remained damp for the finale, as Sochi provided a perfect playground for frenetic touring car shenanigans. Yvan Muller blew his advantage from pole position as Azcona took the lead, but the

race was quickly neutralised after Magnus and Attila Tassi's Honda collided under acceleration from the lights, the Belgian's Audi left stranded on the track. Once it was cleared, Azcona prepared to bid for a rare WTCR double – only for Muller's Lynk & Co to smash into the back of his Cupra at the penultimate corner as the safety car peeled into the pits. Both were out. Muller's contrition quelled Azcona's initial fury. "It was a very frustrating moment because I didn't expect that crash from Yvan," he said. "But I really appreciate that he came to me to apologise."

As Nestor Girolami found himself with a surprise lead, Bence Boldizs and wildcard local Kirill Ladygin collided at Turn 3, the Hungarian's Zengo Cupra smacking hard into the barrier. Finally on lap seven, following another safety car intervention, the field was unleashed for what turned out to be an action-packed thrash to the flag.

Huff was quickly on to Girolami and made a great pass for his first victory since returning this year to the WTCR, to become the 12th different winner in 16 races. "We deserved that after the horrific year we've had, with seven DNFs," said a delighted Huff, who lapped quickly while managing a fuel pressure alarm on his dash and a worrying misfire.

Vervisch came through to finish second and secure his place as runner-up in the points, thanks to a consistent second half of the season following a slow start for Audi's new RS 3 LMS. "I should jump on the car because this is a mega achievement," he said.

DAMIEN SMITH



Huff collected his first WTCR win since 2018 in the second race

Yamamoto drama gives it to TOM'S pair

SUPER GT
FUJI (JPN)
28 NOVEMBER
ROUND 8/8

Toyota and TOM'S came away with Super GT title glory in a dramatic season finale at Fuji, with Honda star Naoki Yamamoto cruelly denied the top prize.

Yuhi Sekiguchi and Sho Tsuboi trailed Yamamoto by 16 points, meaning they had to win with Yamamoto scoring no more than a few points to have any chance of pulling off a surprise upset. And that's exactly what transpired. Sekiguchi and Tsuboi took a dominant victory in their Toyota GR Supra, while Yamamoto's Kunimitsu Honda NSX-GT was crippled in a collision with the GT300-class ARTA Honda NSX GT3 at Turn 1 with just 15 laps to go.

Rookie Ren Sato had outbraked himself in his own battle against the GT300 title-winning Subaru BRZ, steaming up the inside of Yamamoto and causing an impact that ended Honda's hopes of taking back-to-back GT500 titles for the first time. Yamamoto and Tadasuke



Sekiguchi and Tsuboi overturned deficit for title

Makino had been running fourth up to that stage, which would have been enough for the two-time champion to secure the crown.

Toyota dominated the final race of the season on its home turf, repeating the top-five lockout that it achieved in the GR Supra's very first race at Fuji last year. Ryo Hirakawa and Sacha Fenestraz completed a TOM'S 1-2, in Hirakawa's final Super GT race before his imminent call-up to Toyota's WEC Hypercar squad, while the polesitting Rookie Racing machine of Kazuya Oshima and Kenta Yamashita was third.

Of the other title contenders, ARTA Honda pair Tomoki Nojiri and Nirei Fukuzumi could do no better than sixth

after a slow pitstop, while the Real Racing Honda of Bertrand Baguette and Koudai Tsukakoshi was eliminated early on when Baguette went for a clumsy move at the last corner on Nobuharu Matsushita's Impul Nissan.

Nissan's best finisher was the NISMO GT-R of Ronnie Quintarelli and Tsugio Matsuda in seventh. It was the final outing for the R35-generation GT-R in the GT500 class ahead of its anticipated replacement by the 'Z' model for 2022.

JAMIE KLEIN

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Kristoffersson is comeback king

WORLD RALLYCROSS
NURBURGRING (DEU)
27-28 NOVEMBER
ROUND 7/7

Johan Kristoffersson claimed his fourth World Rallycross Championship crown after ending the 2021 campaign tied on points with Timmy Hansen.

Kristoffersson had it all to do at the double-header climax at the Nurburgring, but won his semi-final in his Audi to claim pole for Saturday's final. Peugeot driver Hansen was penalised for contact in his



Kristoffersson is now a four-time champion

semi-final, so lined up sixth for the final.

Kristoffersson romped to victory on a snowy track, with Hansen second before he was excluded for first-corner contact with Niclas Gronholm. That promoted WRX debutant Yuri Belevskiy (Audi) to a superb second, followed by the Hyundais of Krisztian Szabo and Gronholm.

Hansen's points lead had now been trimmed to four, and it was down to one by Sunday's final, with Kristoffersson winning his semi-final and Hansen again pinged for a clash with Gronholm, dropping him to the back of the grid for the final.

While Gronholm won that race, Hansen's brother and team-mate Kevin held second and tried to back Kristoffersson into the clutches of the sister Peugeot. But Kristoffersson held on to finish third, beat his rival and claim the title on a results countback. Guerlain Chicherit (Renault) and Enzo Ide (Audi) rounded out the finalists.

"What an absolutely unbelievable weekend – just crazy," said Kristoffersson. "To win the championship after starting out with a new team and in a new car this year is just fantastic. It means a lot."

WEEKEND WINNERS

WTCR

SOCHI (RUS)

Race 1 Mikel Azcona
Zengo Motorsport (Cupra Leon TCR)

Race 2 Rob Huff
Zengo Motorsport (Cupra Leon TCR)

SUPER GT

FUJI (JPN)

Yuhi Sekiguchi/Sho Tsuboi
TOM'S (Toyota GR Supra)

WORLD RALLYCROSS

NURBURGRING (DEU)

Race 1 Johan Kristoffersson
EKS JC (Audi S1)

Race 2 Niclas Gronholm
GRX-SET (Hyundai i20)

SUPER TC2000

BUENOS AIRES (ARG)

Julian Santero
Toyota Gazoo Racing (Toyota Corolla)

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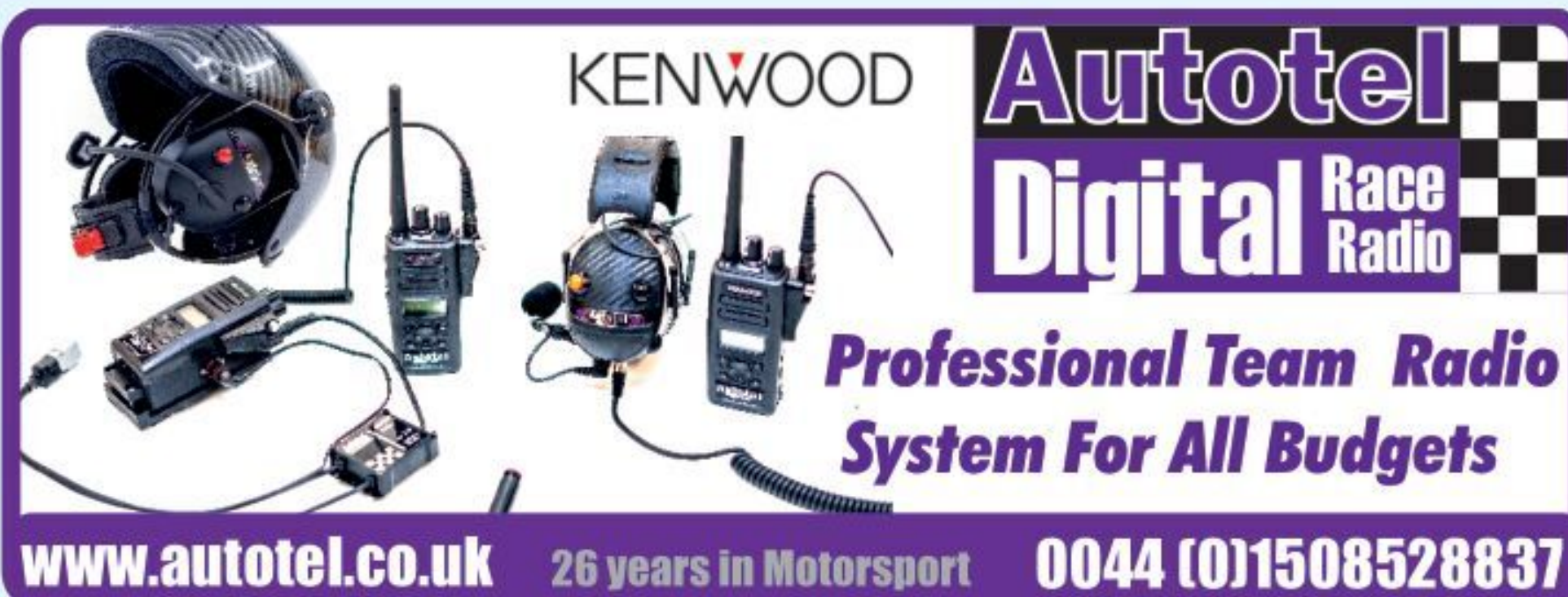
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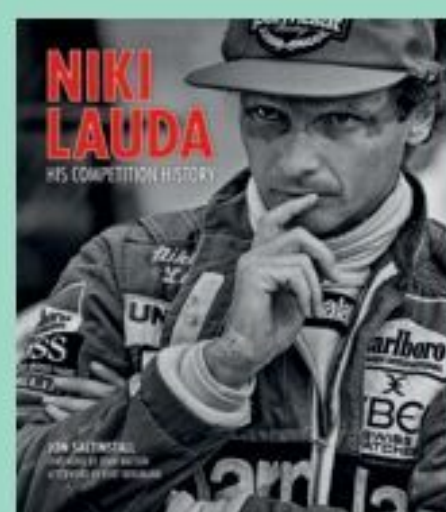
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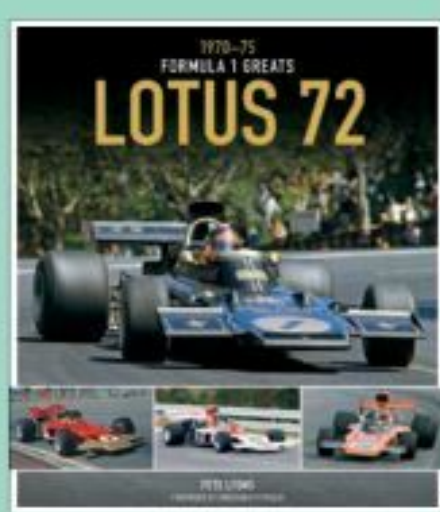
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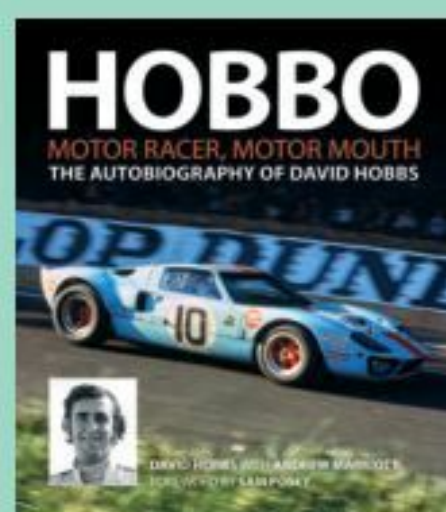
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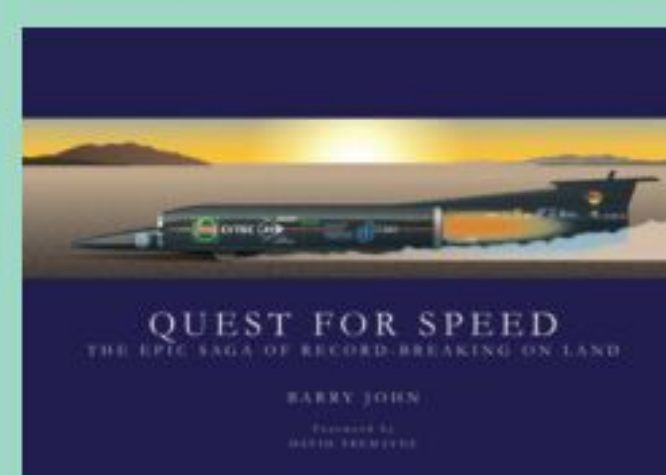
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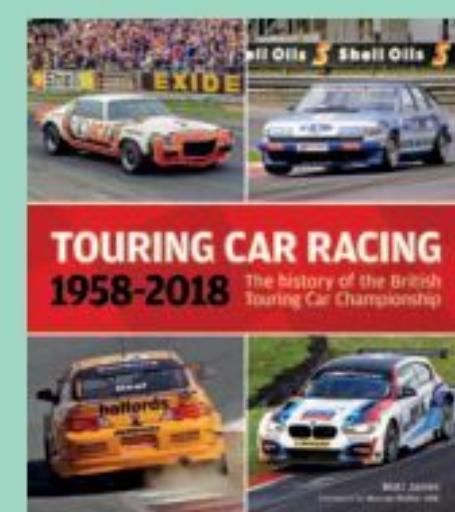
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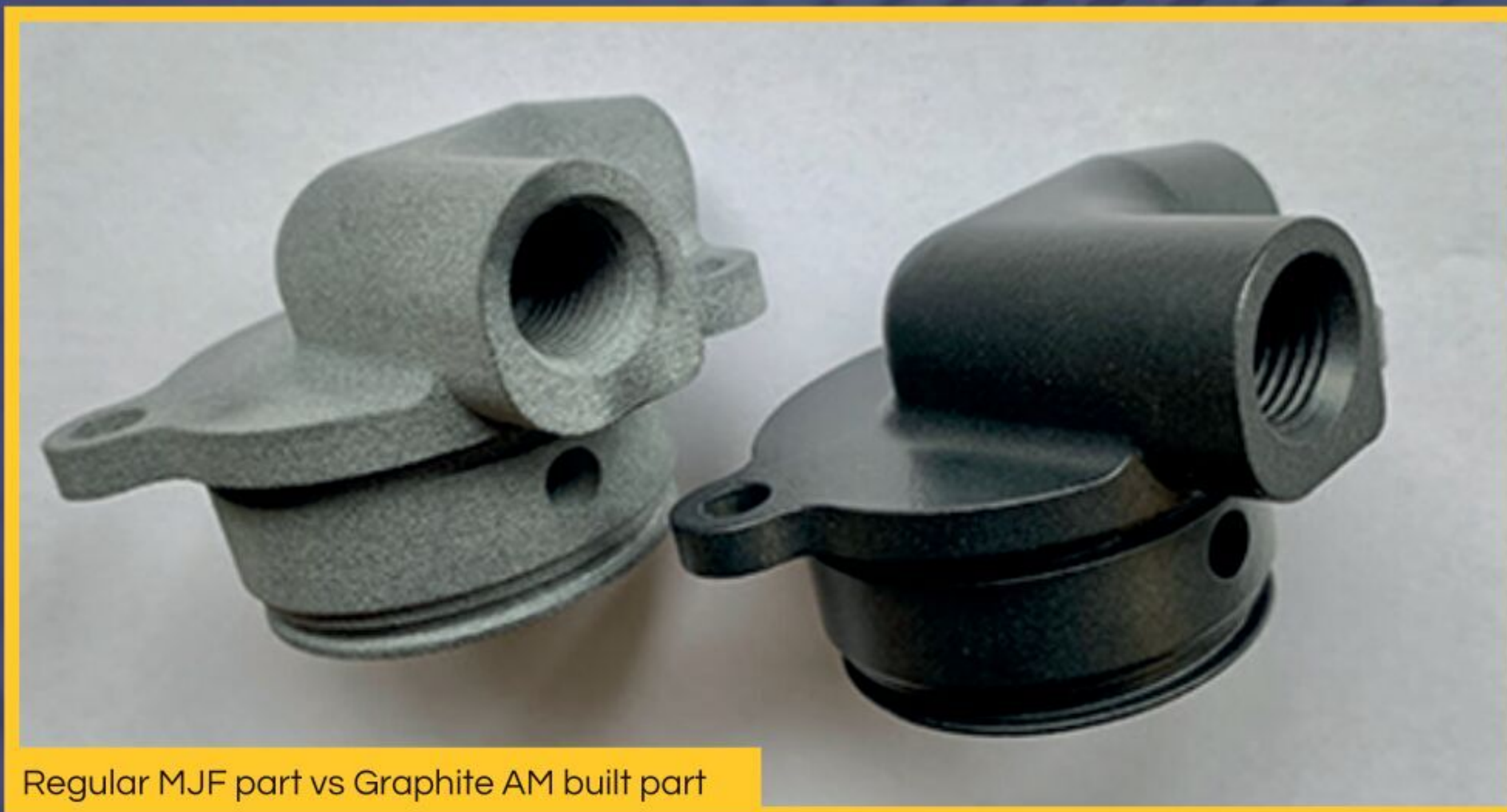


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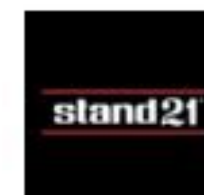
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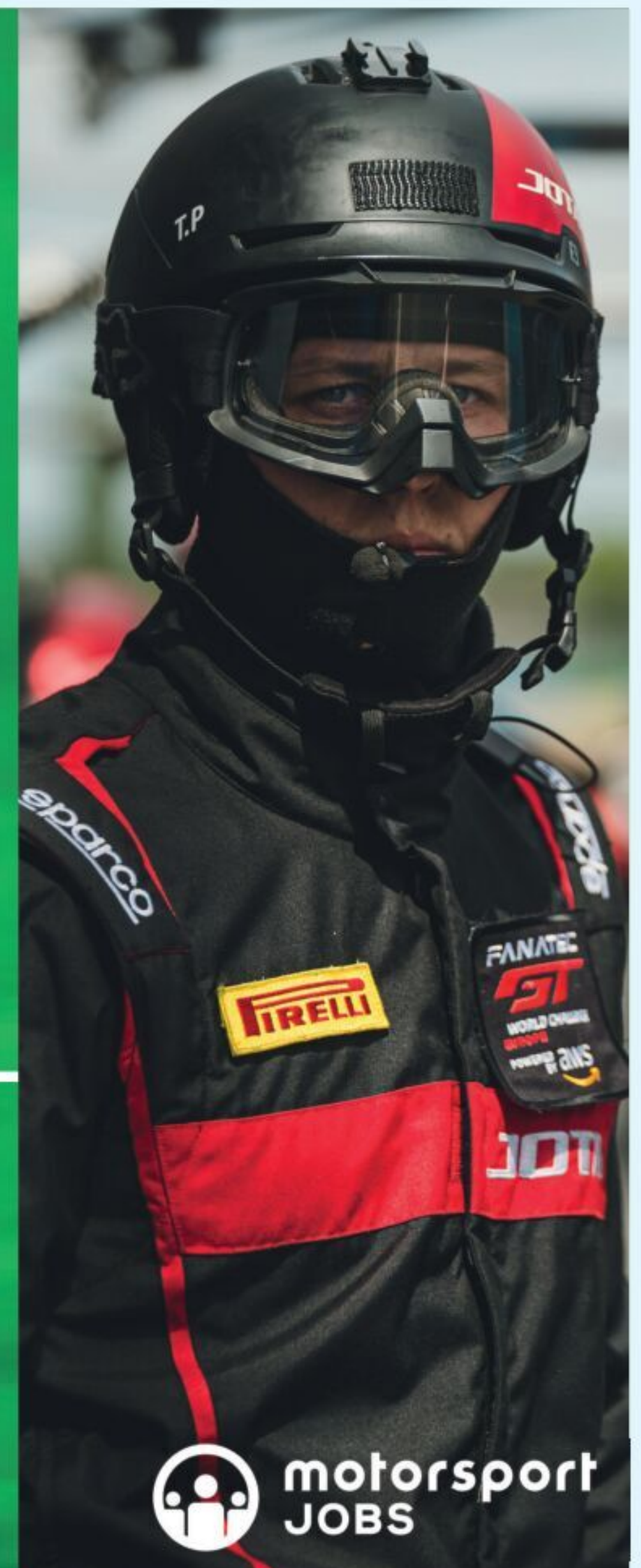
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GB3 Walter Hayes Trophy winner Esterson joins Douglas team

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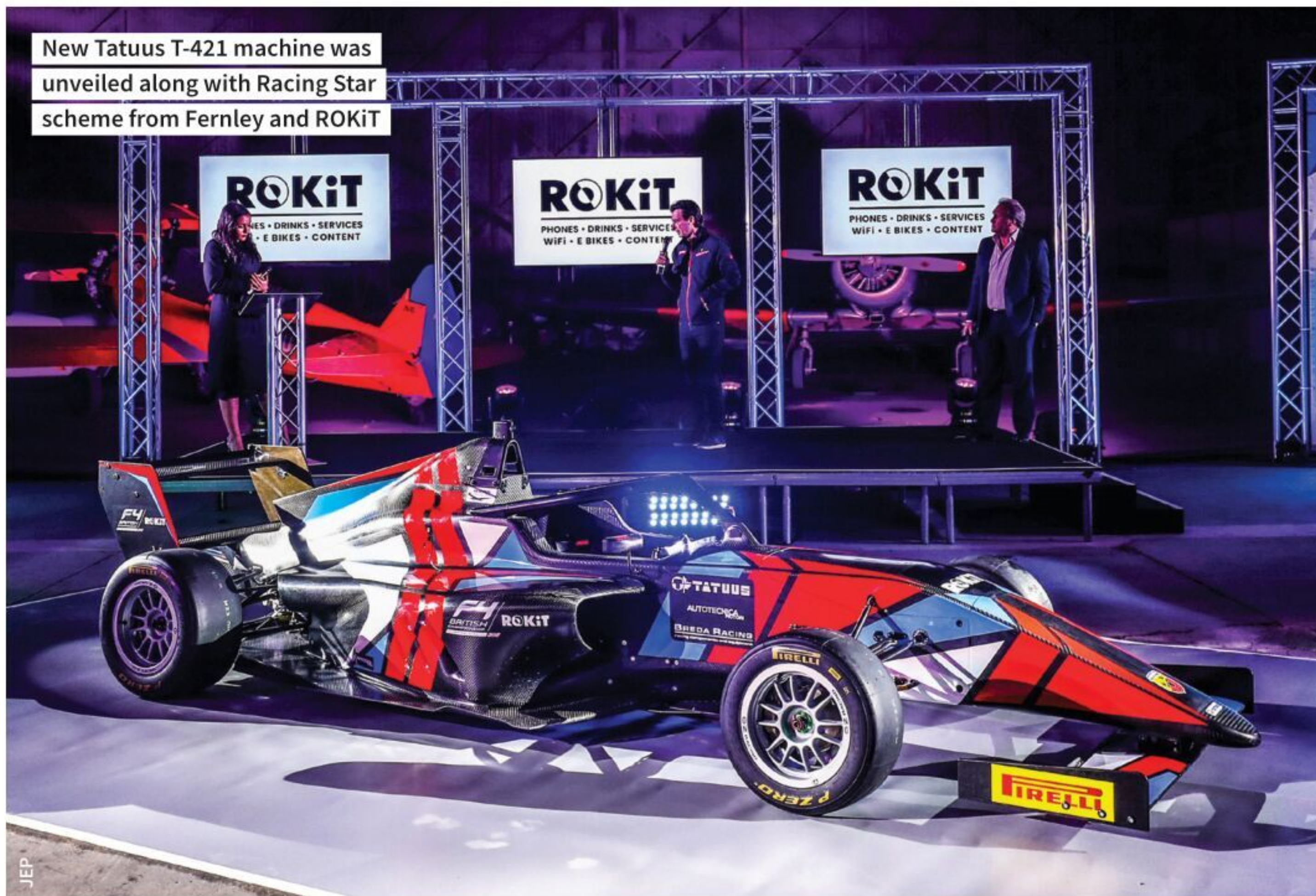
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BRITISH F4 CAR AND PRIZE DRIVES SHOOTOUT REVEALED

BRITISH F4

The wraps came off British Formula 4's new car at the category's launch last week, and a Racing Star scheme from FIA Single Seater Commission president Bob Fernley that will offer two fully funded 2023 drives was among the announcements made at the event.

British F4 has undergone a major revamp for 2022, with governing body Motorsport UK taking over from long-time promoter RacingLine as organiser. Among a raft of changes, the series will swap from its previous Mygale-Ford chassis/engine combination for the Tatuus-Abarth set-up that is popular among European F4 championships.

That new, halo-fitted car was on show in the UK for the first time on Friday at the launch, in the colours of new British F4 title partner ROKiT. The company is also funding the Racing Star initiative, the brainchild of long-serving Force India F1 deputy team principal Fernley, which will enable 14 and 15-year-olds to take part in a series of digital races ahead of a final shootout next spring on simulators at the University of Bolton's National Centre for Motorsport Engineering facility.

One male and one female driver will be selected from this final to secure a six-month coaching programme

with the Motorsport UK Academy ahead of a paid-for season in British F4 in 2023.

"Talent detection programmes are commonplace in sport, generally, but in motorsport this really is a ground-breaking opportunity for two stars of the future to make an impact in a virtual environment, then have the framework and support to translate their abilities into real-world competition," said Fernley.

"It's pushing the boundaries to see where we go, because I'm absolutely convinced that we've got talent out there and those kids can't afford to go karting, and we might just find the two that we're looking for."

Fernley added that, if the scheme is a success, he intends for it to be rolled out across the world in collaboration with other F4 categories.

Also revealed at the launch was a partnership with McLaren that will give the British F4 champion the chance to be embedded within the team for the British Grand Prix, while the title winner will also receive a Formula Regional European test.

Motorsport UK CEO Hugh Chambers said further plans for the 2022 season will be revealed in the coming weeks. "I'm really proud of the package we've come up with now – it's going to be the best in the world," he added.

STEPHEN LICKORISH

OPINION



The location for British Formula 4's 2022 launch was the perfect metaphor for the challenge the series now faces. The event

was held in a hangar on the old RAF Bicester site, used as a training base during the Second World War, just as British F4 is beginning its own battle on the world stage.

Ever since Motorsport UK announced that it would be organising the championship, the governing body's CEO Hugh Chambers has made clear that he wants to re-establish the UK as *the* place for aspiring drivers to undertake their development, rather than F4 series in Europe and elsewhere. The introduction of the second-generation FIA F4 machinery for 2022 makes now the perfect time to begin the journey towards that goal.

But there were questions whether Motorsport UK was the right organisation or had the right plan to succeed in its quest. One potential issue was replacing the substantial investment Ford previously put into the series and whether UK licence holders would be left paying the bill. But that question has seemingly been answered, with the arrival of ROKiT and other investors meaning Chambers says that the commercial interest in British F4 "has probably even surprised us in terms of the response from the marketplace". Ford's money has already, therefore, been replaced and more added to the pot.

Exciting announcements like the Racing Star initiative – a ground-breaking idea that presents an opportunity for unproven teenagers to race, who would otherwise be priced out of competing – add to the buzz around the series. And increasing and formalising the role of the Motorsport UK Academy in helping to coach and support all drivers taking part is also a smart move.

There is clearly still a long way to go. Chambers is targeting 20 cars for next year – not easy when costs are going up and other cheaper options are available. But, if that goal can be met, then Motorsport UK will be off to a flying start in its battle to be the world's best.

STEPHEN LICKORISH

Esterson joins Douglas for GB3 campaign

GB3

Walter Hayes Trophy winner Max Esterson will compete in the GB3 Championship with Douglas Motorsport next season.

The American graduates from the National Formula Ford Championship, in which he finished third in the standings this season in his first full-time campaign in the UK. As part of the Team USA Scholarship scheme, Esterson claimed second at the Formula Ford Festival at Brands Hatch in October, before going one better at Silverstone, where he dominated en route to Walter Hayes Trophy success.

“I think the three options for 2022 were I could stay in Formula Ford, move into USF2000 or do GB3, and that [GB3] just made the most sense,” said the 19-year-old. “I wanted to stay in the UK, GB3 is



better value and testing is unlimited. I’ve tested the GB3 car and it’s not been overwhelming – with the aero the faster you go it’s easier, it’s just getting over that thought.”

Esterson joins the championship as a new car is set to be introduced for 2022, featuring a halo head-protection device, while power and downforce levels are set to increase. He believes this may mean that the gap between newcomers and second-year drivers is smaller than usual.

“I don’t think it’s a bad thing and it does work in my favour, but I don’t think it will be hugely different,” he said. “Douglas are a smaller team compared to Hitech GP

or Carlin but GB3 is their main focus – they don’t have five other championships to worry about. They want to win.

“I think fighting for the championship would be a lofty goal, but we said the same thing about Formula Ford and we fought for the title. If, by the end of the year, I can be in the top three or four each race that would be good.”

Esterson is the fourth driver confirmed for the 2022 GB3 Championship, with Elite Motorsport running Tom Lebbon and John Bennett, and Callum Voisin joining Carlin.

STEFAN MACKLEY

➔ P68 GB3 TRACK TEST

New United Formula Ford championship

FORMULA FORD 1600

A new Formula Ford championship combining Heritage Formula Ford and the Champion of Brands series has been launched for next season.

United Formula Ford will feature seven rounds, with a qualifying session and two 20-minute races taking place on the same day at each event. There will be three visits to Brands Hatch and one to each of Donington Park, Silverstone National, Cadwell Park and Snetterton.

Five classes will make up

the grid, from Pre-1972 to Post-1998 machines, with drivers from each class eligible to fight for the outright title, while the Champion of Brands will become a championship, with points accumulated across the three rounds at the Kent venue.

The new championship will be organised by MotorSport Vision Racing and James Beckett, who believes that it will be more appealing to drivers and teams in FF1600. Entries for both existing series had already started to drop this season, and they combined



on several occasions.

“Quite simply, it’s the unification of Heritage Formula Ford and the Champion of Brands, which will reduce the number of meetings in the season and make it more acceptable to people,” said Beckett, who also organises the successful

Walter Hayes Trophy.

“Feedback has been really good from the teams that run in other series, to ones doing the National championship. I would like to turn up with 20-plus cars each race and I don’t see why that couldn’t be achieved.”

STEFAN MACKLEY

Plum Pudding event
last took place in 2019
before COVID-19 hit



Plum Pudding meeting to return as 750MC takes over running

750MC

The 750 Motor Club will take over the running of the annual Plum Pudding race meeting at Mallory Park later this month.

The traditional Boxing Day event has most recently been organised by the British Racing & Sports Car Club, but didn't take place last season due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It is set to feature four car races for its 2021 return.

There will be two races for saloons/tin-tops such as Honda Civics, Renault Clios and BMWs, and two for sports-racer machinery including Radicals and Sports 1000s. The grid for the opening race for each will be determined by

order of signing up to the event.

"The circuit asked if we were interested in picking it up and we said yes," said 750MC competitions manager Giles Groombridge. "If it goes well I don't see why we wouldn't continue organising it."

The 750MC has also announced its calendar for 2022, with a return to Pembrey planned for the first time since 2018 on 18-19 June.

"They approach us every year to ask if we would like a meeting," said Groombridge. "We needed a June meeting and were able to accommodate. We have to show as much support to venues as we can, especially with the past year and COVID."

STEFAN MACKLEY

Powell and Lines team up in GTs

BRITISH GT

Reigning Britcar Endurance champion Will Powell will step up to British GT next year in a McLaren 570S GT4 alongside former British Touring Car Championship racer Stewart Lines.

Powell is no stranger to McLaren machinery – he campaigned a 650S GT3 on his way to Britcar's Class 1 title alongside Dave Scaramanga.

TCR UK and Civic Cup promoter Lines, a BTCC regular between 2015 and 2017, has been gaining experience in GT racing and won last year's Ginetta GT4 Supercup Am title. Their Pro-Am class entry will be fielded under the

Maximum Networks with Motus One banner.

"I'm delighted we've been able to put a full-season entry together at the highest level of GT racing in the UK," said Powell, who also contested a part-season of TCR UK this year in a Hyundai i30 N TCR run by Lines's Maximum Motorsport operation. "The team will be working hard over the winter to give us a competitive GT4 car from the off next season."

Lines added: "I believe we will be a competitive entry against the young guns in GT4."

JAMES NEWBOLD

IN THE HEADLINES

MINI JCW OPENS FOR 2022

Entries have now opened for the JCW class of the Mini Challenge next year, which will again feature on the British Touring Car Championship support bill at seven events. It will return to Silverstone, but skip Croft and the two Thruxton fixtures. A slight facelift of the car is planned, to bring it in line with the latest road cars available. This includes tweaks to the front and rear bumpers, sills and wheelarch trims.

PALMOWSKI PICKS PREPTECH

New Ginetta Junior scholar Alisha Palmowski has selected to run with the Preptech UK squad for her fully funded season in the series next year. "I had a test day with them in the week leading up to this year's scholarship and the environment they provided was perfect for me," she said. "They were able to quickly help me build confidence, so that I was able to get the best out of both myself and the car with limited previous running."

SHIN JOINS JHR IN UAE F4

South Korean karter Michael Shin will make his car racing debut in the UAE Formula 4 series this winter with JHR Developments. Shin has completed a number of test days with the team, including Friday practice for the Brands Hatch British F4 finale. The UAE F4 contest will use the new second-generation FIA F4 machinery for the first time and several UK teams are set to compete.

PRIZE DRIVES AT DONINGTON

The top three from the 2021 Junior Saloon Car Championship had their prize drives at Donington Park last week. Champion Charlie Hand, Harvey Caton and Alfie Jeakins had runs in a Civic Cup car, before sampling a Maximum Motorsport VW Golf TCR (below). Due to his height, Jeakins had to swap to an Audi TCR. "Although it wasn't that comfortable for me, and difficult with the gear change, it still felt quick," he said.



New contest launched for BMW 1 Series

BMW 1 SERIES SUPERCUP

The British Racing & Sports Car Club will run a new BMW 1 Series Supercup next year as it bids to create a top-end club series for rear-wheel-drive tin-tops.

The new category is open to three or five-door F20 or F21 models of the German manufacturer's 1.6-litre turbo-powered hatchback, and the concept has been under development by the BRSCC for the past 18 months. The cars competing in the series will feature a number of bespoke parts designed to transform them into a potent race machine. It is intended to be a series that drivers progress to from other more entry-level contests.

The BMW 1 Series Supercup will begin as a class within the Clubsport Trophy next year to allow more time for cars to be converted, and it is due to get its own standalone grid for 2023.

BRSCC head of formulae development Greg Graham said that the club had assessed its offering and felt "there was



a bit of a gap for a sophisticated race car".

"It sits with our portfolio alongside Fiesta ST240s [the new car introduced to the Fiesta Championship for this year], however it's rear-wheel drive, which gives that choice for people who want to experience rear-wheel drive," he continued.

"It's got 200+bhp and is a proper race car rather than a budget-level Compact Cup. Some people have asked, 'Is this a replacement for the Compact Cup?', but it's not because it's a completely different price sector."

Among the mandatory parts for the car

are adjustable three-way suspension from Proflex and a brake kit from EBC, both specifically developed for this series.

"We wanted to make sure everything we put on the car was right and it's not just a shopping list of parts that's available off the shelf," Graham explained. "The end product is really exciting for us. The early indicators are that we've struck a chord with people."

To ensure that the range of parts is easily accessible and to maintain their "technical equality", Essential Racing has been appointed as the sole supplier.

STEPHEN LICKORISH

Focus on one-day meetings for MGCC in 2022



MGCC

The MG Car Club will primarily focus on running one-day meetings next season, including a first visit to Cadwell Park in five years.

Equipe Classic Racing has taken a significant amount of track time at MGCC events in recent seasons but, with the popular organiser now running

its own meetings next year, the MGCC opted to book a reduced number of days.

It will now operate five one-day fixtures as well as a two-day Silverstone Grand Prix circuit event, MGCC race competitions secretary Mark Baulch saying the club is "planning for MG Live" but a final decision has yet to be taken.

"When I first spoke to

Equipe [about 2022 plans], I put together a programme that was financially viable of five one-day meetings," he said. "We started talking to guests and it seems I could've continued with two-day events. But my decision was to consolidate in 2022 to make sure we can still go racing in 2023 and 2024 onwards."

STEPHEN LICKORISH

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Croft Nostalgia Weekend to return to HSCC's schedule

HSCC

The Croft Nostalgia Weekend will return to the Historic Sports Car Club's calendar in 2022, while headline events on Silverstone and Brands Hatch's Grand Prix circuits are also on a reshuffled schedule.

Run annually from 2010-18, the Croft event was the north-east's best supported transport festival, attracting historic aircraft, military and commercial vehicles, and car and motorcycle owners to the Darlington venue. The club last visited in 2019, when its event was branded the Retro & Classic Weekend.

The September showcase's content will not be detailed until the new year, but it is known that Croft circuit manager Tracey Morley is determined to rebuild the concept she masterminded and developed before others took over the role to which she was subsequently reappointed.

The HSCC's core programme runs from Brands Hatch's Indy Circuit on 2-3 April to its championship finals at Silverstone National on 15-16 October. Its Silverstone International Trophy and Legends of Brands Hatch Superprix keep traditional May and July slots respectively.

Two visits to Oulton Park are back-to-back, with a one-day event on 6 August following the rescheduled Gold Cup (29-31 July), with Snetterton, Donington Park and Cadwell Park also visited.

In addition, the club will again organise Silverstone Classic (moved to the late August Bank Holiday weekend) and the prestigious Walter Hayes Trophy event.

HSCC CEO Andy Dee-Crowne said: "Building on the success of 2021, we have a very good spread of dates. Visits to the Grand Prix circuits at Brands Hatch and Silverstone are real stand-outs."

MARCUS PYE

IN THE HEADLINES

HSCC'S RECOVERY POLICY

The Historic Sports Car Club has reaffirmed its commitment to not recover cars from the side of circuits using telehandlers while the track is still live. Autosport (18 November) has previously criticised the way some officials have responded to incidents, but HSCC CEO Andy Dee-Crowne says the club will always deploy a safety car or red-flag a session rather than conduct a 'live snatch'.

DEEKS TO CLASSIC FF1600

Steve Deeks will race an ex-John Village Crossle 25F in Classic Formula Ford in 2022. Deeks, who competed in National Formula Ford and F3 in the 1980s and 1990s, last raced a Formula Ford regularly in 1989. His return was partly inspired by a guest appearance in the 2018 Walter Hayes Trophy, driving a Van Diemen RF80. The car will be run by Linton Stutely's Enigma team, and Deeks is aiming to also enter the Formula Ford Festival and Walter Hayes Trophy.

SANTA POD'S CALENDAR

Santa Pod has revealed a full calendar of events planned for next year, including the FIA European Drag Racing Championship making a return. The series is due to visit in late May and early September, while six rounds for the Motorsport UK British Drag Racing Championship are scheduled. A number of themed festival weekends are also due to run throughout the year.

KELLY'S PRAGA SWITCH

F3 Cup race winner Shane Kelly is switching to the Praga Cup next year. The head of the University of Wolverhampton Racing team had his first test in the ex-Charlie Martin/Jack Fabbey car at Donington Park last week (below). "It's modern, current and part of a five-year plan," he said. "It's taken a little while to get used to it after always racing single-seaters but, after a few laps, it wasn't that far off our F3 times."



More 2022 SMRC details revealed

SMRC

The Scottish Motor Racing Club has unveiled a six-round calendar for 2022, featuring a return to full-day events for the first time in two years.

Five rounds will be held at Knockhill from April to October, with Cadwell Park retaining its place as the away event in July.

National Formula Ford 1600 again joins the bill for the opener, with Modified Fords and Super Tourers headlining May's second meeting. The Scottish C1 Cup will be the main attraction for the only anti-clockwise round of the year, with a longer 90-minute pitstop race.

Scottish FF1600 will split its season across three clubs:

three rounds with the SMRC; an away round at Croft with the British Racing & Sports Car Club; and two summer meetings with the Knockhill Motor Sports Club.

The Scottish Legends will also make a return to the SMRC bill next year, appearing at the final two rounds of the season.

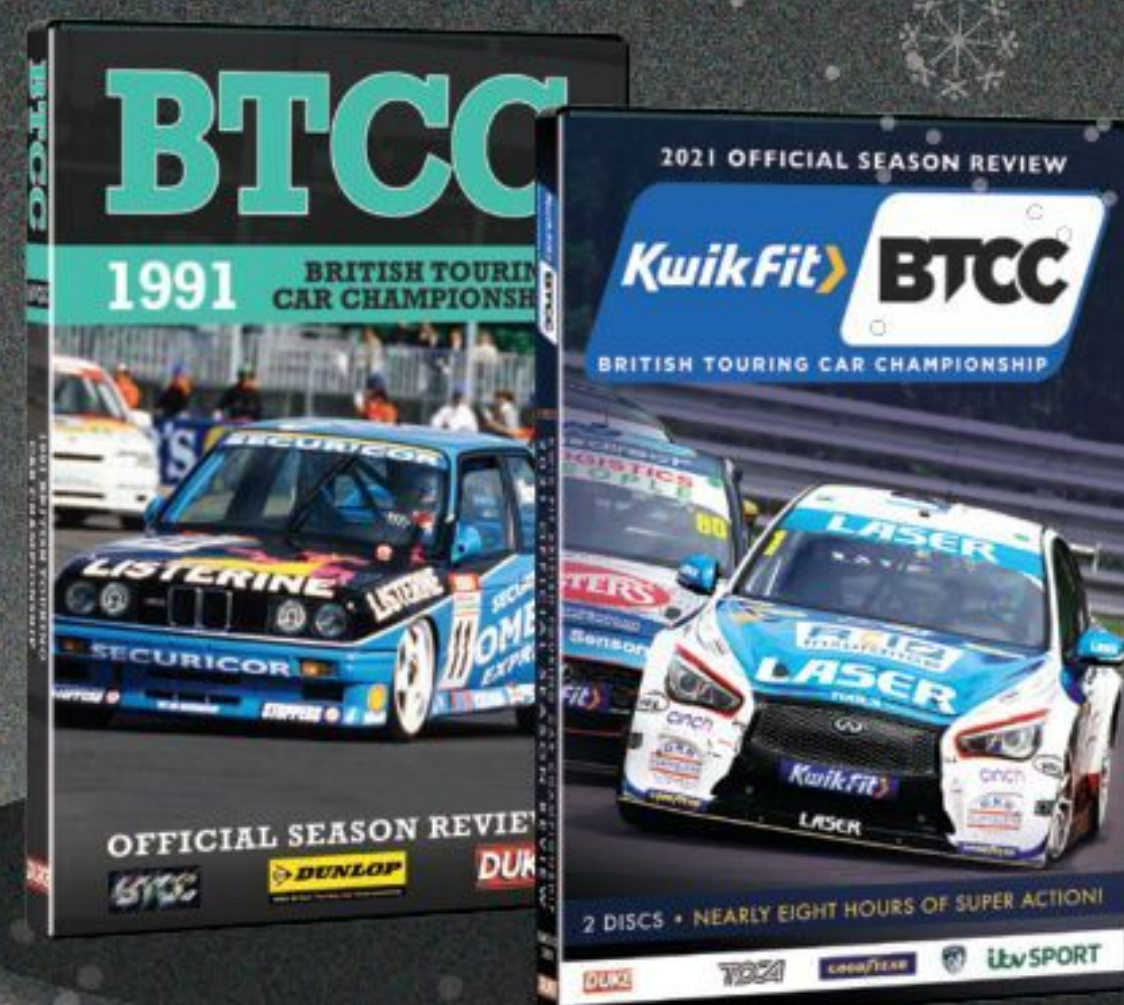
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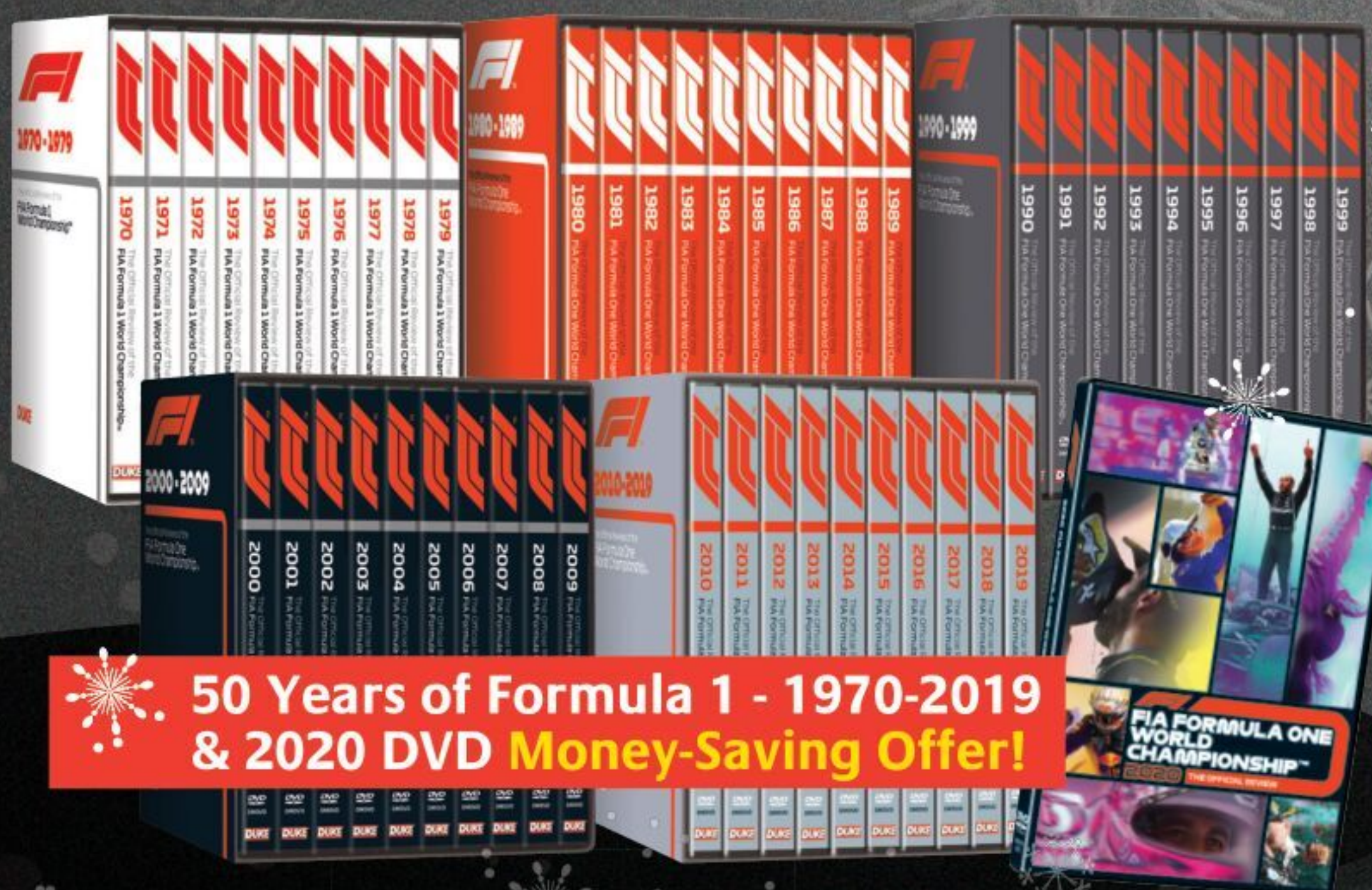
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A Champion drive from Porsche crew

ROGER ALBERT CLARK RALLY
25-29 NOVEMBER

Ryan Champion and Craig Thorley took their Porsche 911 to a famous victory on another challenging edition of the Roger Albert Clark Rally when the marathon forest event ended on Monday afternoon.

From the outset, it was Ford Escort Mk2s to the fore, as Jason Pritchard and Phil Clarke made the early pace in Kielder Forest on Thursday evening and Friday. Chasing them hard were Paul Barrett and Gordon Noble in their Escort, while British Rally Championship frontrunner Osian Pryce and co-driver Noel O'Sullivan struggled to adapt to the challenge of Kielder but ran in contention in third.

As Friday developed, Storm Arwen arrived and, while the final stage was running, the weather worsened dramatically. The rally was temporarily halted as gale-force winds, driving snow and falling trees made conditions very testing. So bad was the situation that around 30 crews and some officials were stranded in Langholm overnight and were taken in by the Crown Inn because all roads out of the town were blocked by trees.

Faced with Saturday's planned stages in southern Scotland covered in fallen trees, rally manager Colin Heppenstall had no choice but to scrub the day completely, while working on getting the event running again with the planned move to Wales for Sunday. Trees were also down in the Welsh forests, but a mighty effort got the Dyfnant and Dyfi stages ready to run, although Gartheiniog was lost.

The action resumed at midday on Sunday and Pryce, now rallying in his back yard, set about clawing back the



three minutes he had lost in the snow and ice of Kielder. The higher parts of the Welsh stages also harboured icy patches, but Pryce was sensational as he closed on the leaders. At the same time, Pritchard rolled out of the event in Dyfi so now Barrett led, but Pryce was chasing hard.

It all came down to the Monday and five stages in south and mid-Wales, which Barrett started with a 1m46s advantage over Pryce. But incredibly, they were both out inside the first seven minutes of the action resuming.

Pryce lost a front wheel from his Escort and his rally was over, and moments later Barrett was caught out over a brow and rolled. Although damage was light, a broken track control arm meant that the Escort was going no further. Champion, who was running third on the road, drove through the stage and saw the two leaders parked up. "I couldn't believe it," he said.



RESULTS

ROGER ALBERT CLARK RALLY

1 Ryan Champion/Craig Thorley

(Porsche 911) 4h13m10s; 2 Seb Perez/

Gary McElhinney (Ford Escort Mk2) +4m04s;

3 Adrian Hetherington/Ronan O'Neill (Escort

Mk2); 4 Ben Friend/Cliff Simmons (Escort

Mk2); 5 Rhys Yates/Max Freeman (Escort Mk2);

6 Robert Gough/Jack Bowen (Escort Mk2).

For full results visit: results.djames.org.uk

Now with a big lead, all Champion had to do was guide the Porsche home for victory by more than four minutes. "We knew reliability would be our strength and the car was bombproof," he added. "We couldn't live with the fastest guys, so we settled into our pace and amazingly it came to us. It's a fantastic rally to win."

Up into a fabulous second came Seb Perez and Gary McElhinney after an up-and-down rally, which included hitting a deer in Kielder on Friday afternoon. Second was just reward for the talented all-rounder in his Escort Mk2, while Northern Irishmen Adrian Hetherington and Ronan O'Neill just held off Ben Friend and Cliff Simmons to take third by six seconds.

One of the absolute drives of the rally came from Adam Milner and Roy Jarvis, who brought their 1600cc crossflow-engined Escort Mk1 into an incredible eighth overall, right up among all the BDG-powered cars.

PAUL LAWRENCE

A GLIMPSE OF THE SINGLE-SEATER ELITE

The current GB3 Championship car is due to be replaced next season. Autosport got behind the wheel to discover what's made it so appealing

STEFAN MACKLEY

PHOTOGRAPHY MIKE HOYER/JEP



The silence is deafening. I'm sitting broadside across the track, fumbling around trying to restart the engine. It's not been the best of starts getting to grips with a modern single-seater.

The car in question is the Tatuus-Mountune used in the GB3 Championship, and my spin comes only minutes into the opening run, thanks to losing control under acceleration exiting the final corner at a damp Snetterton. One positive is that there is no fear of being collected by another vehicle, such is the privilege of being the only car on track for an exclusive test day. The downside is that the Elite Motorsport squad, whose car I'm 'borrowing', and all the officials at the MotorSport Vision venue, can hear every tone of the two-litre engine around the track's 300 layout. Or in this case a distinct lack of such can only mean one thing – I've messed up!

After restarting and been pushed back the right way, I crawl into the pits and, if there's any panic about who they've allowed

in the driving seat, Elite team boss Eddie Ives and his mechanics certainly don't let it show as I offer an apology. Thankfully there's no damage other than to my pride.

My three 'quick' laps have at least opened my eyes to what it's like to drive a single-seater – brief stints in a Formula Ford at Castle Combe and some F4 machinery on Silverstone's Stowe layout, both in monsoons, hardly being valid.

The day is intended as something of a swansong for the Tatuus MSV FA-016 chassis – fundamentally an F4 tub with significant aero and power upgrades, and which is due to be replaced next season in GB3. The current generation of car was introduced ahead of the 2016 campaign, and coincided just days before the season began with a name change from BRDC Formula 4 to the BRDC British F3 Championship.

A change in moniker proved quite apt ahead of the car's introduction – in its final season, and courtesy of a decision by the FIA, the series was rebadged again as the GB3 Championship



Tatuus MSV
FA-016 provides
a first proper
experience of a
modern single-
seater

from the Spa round in late July onwards.

The new car is unsurprisingly set to feature a number of upgrades (see page 70), but that's not to say that the older version has outstayed its welcome. Far from it, as it's proved popular with teams and drivers over the past six years due to its performance parity, reliability and as a proving ground for future stars – past alumni include McLaren Formula 1 driver Lando Norris and two-time W Series champion Jamie Chadwick.

Other than a small facelift ahead of the 2020 season, which included adding slightly more downforce courtesy of new bodywork, and the Duratec engine now being serviced by long-time MSV supporter Mountune, the car has largely stayed the same. Weighing 585kg with the driver included, it runs on Pirelli slicks and wets, is capable of producing 230bhp, has a six-speed sequential gearbox, plus twin wishbone suspension with two-way adjustable dampers and adjustable front and rear anti-roll bars.

The package supports the majority of British GT



Lebbon (centre) offers
advice while Shaw (right)
crunches the numbers

“EVERY CAR YOU DRIVE MOVING UP THE SINGLE-SEATER LADDER, BRAKE TECHNIQUE IS THE HOLY GRAIL”

Championship meetings, and was enough to entice Elite Motorsport into the championship – and single-seaters – for the first time this year. “The car’s fantastic,” says Ives. “It’s really reliable, the engines are really level and there’s just loads of good things. At this sort of level when you’re bringing in new kids to single-seaters, you need to be able to do the mileage having trust and faith in the package underneath. It just gives you confidence in the whole package and makes it easier to sell and promote the whole product.”

Helping me try to get the most from the day in Norfolk is 2020 Ginetta Junior champion Tom Lebbon, who made the jump with Elite into single-seaters this term, achieving one podium and ninth in the standings. The 16-year-old offers advice on what lines to take on a damp track and essentially tells me to take my time building up the speed. The next run proves much more productive, and I log a 2m37s. For comparison, a competitive dry lap time is around the 1m45s mark, while the reference lap I was working off was 2m05s, which Lebbon set earlier this year in qualifying as it began raining during the session.

One of the things to try to get on top of from an early stage is braking. With a downforce-dependent machine such as a formula car, the initial impact of the brakes is when they are the most effective as air pushes down on the car. The more speed that’s scrubbed off, the less air there is to force the car into the ground, and gradually drivers need to bleed off the brake pedal.

All this means that drivers need to hit the pedal late and hard, but there is a fine line. On several occasions I lock up the front right heading into the left-hand Agostini hairpin. This is something that’s common, according to Lebbon, since the weight is transferred to that side of the car under braking. A small tweak to the rear on the brake bias, which is adjustable from the cockpit, solves the problem.

According to race engineer Sarah Shaw, who is on hand to run through the data with me after each run, adapting to the brakes in a single-seater can take new drivers a while. “The braking technique, that’s something we have to get sorted out at this level because every car you drive when you move up the single-seater ladder, that brake technique is the holy grail – you have to brake like that to use the downforce,” says Shaw, whose previous experience includes working for MP Motorsport in FIA F2, as well running the Manor Competition squad with her husband Tony in Formula Renault Eurocup and, before that, Formula Renault UK.

It’s an area I’m soon on top of, and my braking points and speed >>



GB3 has been popular as a proving ground for future stars

“JUST BARREL A LOAD OF SPEED THROUGH THE CORNER AND LET THE DOWNFORCE DO ITS JOB”

through the slow corners are close to Lebbon’s benchmark, which is encouraging.

The outright speed of the car, while quick, is nothing spectacular as I’m falling just short of 140mph before the end of the Bentley Straight at the back of the circuit, pretty much on par with what would be expected. But it’s through the corners where it’s most impressive.

With limited running in downforce machines, relying on what’s effectively an invisible force might be an easy concept

to accept sitting in the garage, less so when barrelling into most braking zones at over 100mph. And with “the worst possible track conditions”, according to Shaw – it’s greasy – it is far from an ideal time to be trying to find the limit.

“Some drivers will find the limit by going past it and having to trim it back, some will build up to the limit,” says Shaw. “But if they haven’t driven anything with downforce, that is quite a big thing to get used to. This car has got a decent amount of downforce, so it’s good for training the drivers. But it’s one



GB3 CHAMPIONSHIP’S NEW ERA

“We wanted it to do an even better job at filling this gap between FIA Formula 4 and FIA Formula 3 and there clearly is a gap there.”

Jonathan Palmer is no stranger to producing successful junior single-seater championships – the MotorSport Vision CEO was responsible for Formula Palmer Audi and MSV Formula 2. That focus has shifted onto the GB3 Championship more recently, with the new car being introduced for next season.

“It’s got about 20-25% more downforce so it’s a fair old performance hike, and the power of the car is going up from 225bhp

to 250bhp,” he says. “It’s now got the throttle body inlets at the side and we’re back to the old Formula 3 style of airbox. It’s going to look a great car, it’s going to sound a great car.”

All this will result in

a performance boost over the current generation despite the addition of a halo head protection device adding an estimated 12kg to the weight, while elements of the current car will remain such as

gearbox, suspension, brakes and electronics.

The new car will also provide a level playing field, with all teams starting from scratch with regards to set-up and data. It’s an opportunity for teams like

Elite Motorsport, who only joined GB3 this season, but have a pedigree in other series.

“We’re looking forward to getting the new car next year because I feel like there was an element of us versus people with four years’ worth of experience with that exact car, which is never easy to overcome,” says team boss Eddie Ives.

“Everything that MSV and Tatuus have come up with looks fantastic. I think it was the right thing to get the halo on the car and it’s the right thing to try and make the car a little bit quicker. We’re not going to be changing anything on the new car that’s detrimental.”



Ives (left) and Palmer wax lyrical to Mackley about upgraded GB3



of those things – in order to trust the downforce, there’s no other way than to just barrel a load of speed through the corner, feel it and let it do its job.”

Not intent on spinning again, or worse, I take the latter approach and build my speed into the afternoon, which includes running on a worn set of wets more akin to inters as the track slowly begins to dry and the rear anti-roll bar, which was previously disconnected to induce understeer, is reconnected.

Now that I’ve got to grips with the play of the throttle pedal, exiting corners is becoming more of a fluid process and the application of power is happening sooner, but doesn’t feel as brutal. I’m also beginning to experience slight sensations of the front pushing through the high-speed left flick of Hamilton, a sign that I’m at last starting to ask enough of the car’s aerodynamics. Any slides by this point, notably still out of the slower corners of Nelson and Murrays, feel manageable as heat continues building up in the tyres.

With the Pirelli rubber being such a critical aspect of the car, tyre pressures are a close-kept secret among the teams. “I think the biggest surprise to us was the tyres because we were used to the Pirelli in F2, and that’s a tyre that comes on and then falls to bits within about two laps,” says Shaw.

“Whereas this one, I think because of the nature of the championship it would be no good for young drivers to just have one-lap tyre life and then be struggling with degradation. The pressure is the first thing you look at and you know if it’s in the window based on how the pressures have come up.”

Feeling more comfortable in my surroundings, I have time to look at the onboard lap timer on my final run, intent on making gains each time around. My last lap proves to be the quickest – a 2m17.38s. That means I’ve taken 20s off my morning time across 52 laps of running, or the equivalent of more than four race distances in the space of effectively five hours.

“You only had the one spin, you never put a foot wrong again,” says Shaw. “You were sensible about it, just built up and improved every time you went out. I think you did really well considering you’d never driven anything like that. And you had all those people watching – I didn’t envy you!”

I’m still a long way from the car’s full potential, but the day does give me an insight into what it’s capable of and why it’s revered by those who have competed in it and has been a destination for so many motorsport talents.

An eye-opening experience to an impressive bit of kit, even if I’m unlikely to get a call-up for next season. ❧



No pressure: Elite crew keep an eye on progress

NOTABLE BRITISH F3/GB3 DRIVERS	
DRIVER	WHERE DID THEY GO?
Matheus Leist (2016)	IndyCar/IMSA SportsCar
Lando Norris (2016)	Formula 1
Enaam Ahmed (2016-17)	FIA Formula 3 European/Japanese F3
Jamie Chadwick (2017-18)	W Series champion (2019, 2021)
Linus Lundqvist (2017-18)	Indy Lights
Tom Gamble (2018)	WEC/ELMS
Clement Novalak (2018-19)	FIA Formula 3
Johnathan Hoggard (2019)	FIA Formula 3
Kaylen Frederick (2019-20)	FIA Formula 3
Zak O’Sullivan (2021)	FIA Formula 3?

Bold – British F3/GB3 champion

ONCE IN ROYAL DAVIDSON'S CITY

CHRISTMAS ATTRACTION LAP OF LIGHTS

Silverstone is no stranger to the sights and sounds of Formula 1 machinery, and likewise Mercedes test driver Anthony Davidson has turned plenty of laps around the British Grand Prix venue.

But Davidson's latest outing last week was of a different kind – one filled with lots of flashing lights, festive joy and Santa Claus in place of Toto Wolff. While some might be hoping that this was ahead of a new night race planned for the 2022 season, it was in fact the launch of Silverstone's Lap of Lights event, with Davidson given the task of taking a Mercedes W10 around to officially open the illuminations.

"That was really exhilarating in the dark following the lights around the circuit, although it was a bit scary at times," he says. "The team has really enjoyed getting into the Christmas spirit and putting on this very sparkling show for everyone."

It's the second year that Silverstone has hosted this

event. Previously known as Lapland, it was conceived in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic as circuits sought ways to regain lost revenue from not being allowed to welcome a crowd to most race meetings. It was a hit with families, so as you might expect it has returned this year bigger and better.

There's more focus on the off-track activities, which includes Ice Trak (the chance to skate through the pitlane and garages) as well as curling and even axe-throwing, because who doesn't enjoy hurling sharp-bladed objects through the air?

There's also The Lodge, where punters can enjoy festive drinks and food, live music and a children's cinema, as well as the chance to meet the big man himself (*presumably we're not talking about Davidson here – Ed*) ahead of his day job on Christmas Eve.

The main attraction, though, is the chance to drive around the circuit. You may not be setting any purple sectors since you're restricted to 5mph, but it's an experience not many would have previously had the chance to enjoy, especially with their families. It's an

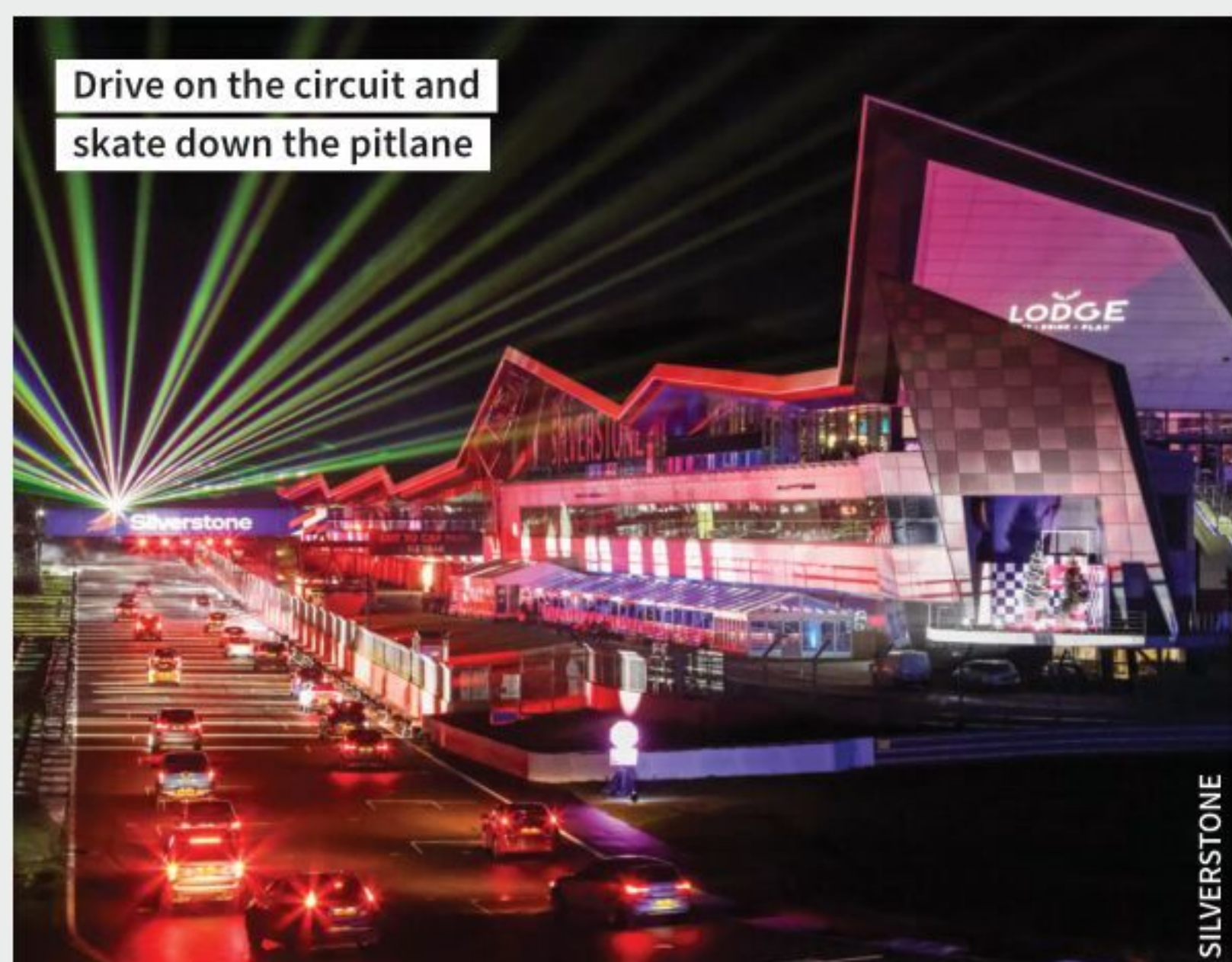
Visitors to Santa's
grotto will be required
to arrive more slowly





Davidson opened Silverstone's festive celebration with a "scary at times" lap in a Mercedes W10

SILVERSTONE



SILVERSTONE

impressive spectacle as you're guided through the various countries of the world, all while listening to Christmas songs via the circuit's radio station.

To the Grinches out there it may sound like hell, but there's no denying that it's proving popular, and the home of British motorsport is quickly becoming the home of Christmas.

Silverstone managing director Stuart Pringle adds: "Anthony and Mercedes-AMG Petronas have put on a great show for us tonight and I could not think of a more fitting way to open Lap of Lights. I have had to reassure Father Christmas that the rest of our nights will be run at a more subdued pace as I think he got a bit of a shock this evening when he saw the W10 approach his grotto at speed!"

"After 11 months of planning it is great to see so many families here having fun, and I look forward to welcoming many more over the festive period."

STEFAN MACKLEY

The event is set to run until 3 January, but will be closed on 25 December and 29-30 December. Prices start at £30 per car including all occupants, while the Ice Trak is £8 for adults and £6 per child.

For full details or to book, visit [Silverstone.co.uk](https://www.silverstone.co.uk)

FINISHING STRAIGHT



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HIGHLIGHT OF THE WEEK



REMEMBERING SIR FRANK WILLIAMS

Sir Frank Williams, whose Formula 1 squad became one of the most successful in grand prix racing's history, died earlier this week at the age of 79. GP Racing's Stuart Codling takes a look at the life and career of the legendary team owner.

Go to uk.motorsport.tv



autosport.com/podcast



AWARD FINALISTS' HOPES AND DREAMS



The four finalists for the 2021 Aston Martin Autosport BRDC Young Driver of the Year Award are the subject of the Autosport Podcast this week. Ollie Bearman, Jonny Edgar, Louis Foster and Zak O'Sullivan all showcased their abilities at Silverstone last month, and discuss their careers and aspirations as part of the latest mini-series – ahead of the winner being announced at this year's Autosport Awards.

WHAT'S ON

INTERNATIONAL MOTORSPORT

Saudi Arabian GP

Formula 1 World Championship
Round 21/22

Jeddah, Saudi Arabia

5 December

TV Live Sky Sports F1, Sun 1725

TV Highlights

Sky Sports F1, Sun 2130,
Channel 4, Sun 2200

FIA Formula 2 Round 7/8

Jeddah, Saudi Arabia

4-5 December

TV Live Sky Sports F1,
Sat 1220, Sat 1835,
Sun 1415

Bathurst 1000

Australian Supercars
Round 12/12

Mount Panorama,
Australia

5 December

TV Live BT Sport 2,
Sun 0045



WHAT COULD HAVE BEEN

When a career-changing move goes begging

BJORN WIRDHEIM

The money shortfall at the HVM squad meant that Bjorn Wirdheim couldn't test throughout his 2005 Champ Car rookie season, and that emulating the standout debut campaigns of previous Formula 3000 champions Juan Pablo Montoya and Sebastian Bourdais was never likely. But the year he regards as "the most difficult" of a career that afterwards took him to Japan for 11 years could have been very different had a returning champion not taken his preferred seat.

Wirdheim had impressed veteran team manager Jim McGee at a test for Patrick Racing in 2003, arranged by F3000 chassis supplier Lola as a prize for his title success. He was offered a contract, although the Swede instead signed a three-year deal at the Jaguar Formula 1 team, initially as its third driver with an option to race in 2005. But the team's sale to Red Bull meant Wirdheim was back on the market and McGee – now at PKV Racing – moved swiftly to get him over to Barber Motorsports Park for a test.

"That was the team I was expecting to sign for," he says. "I went to the factory and I stayed with Jim to prepare. Then all of that went into the drain..."

Jimmy Vasser (the V in PKV) instead signed 2002 champion Cristiano da

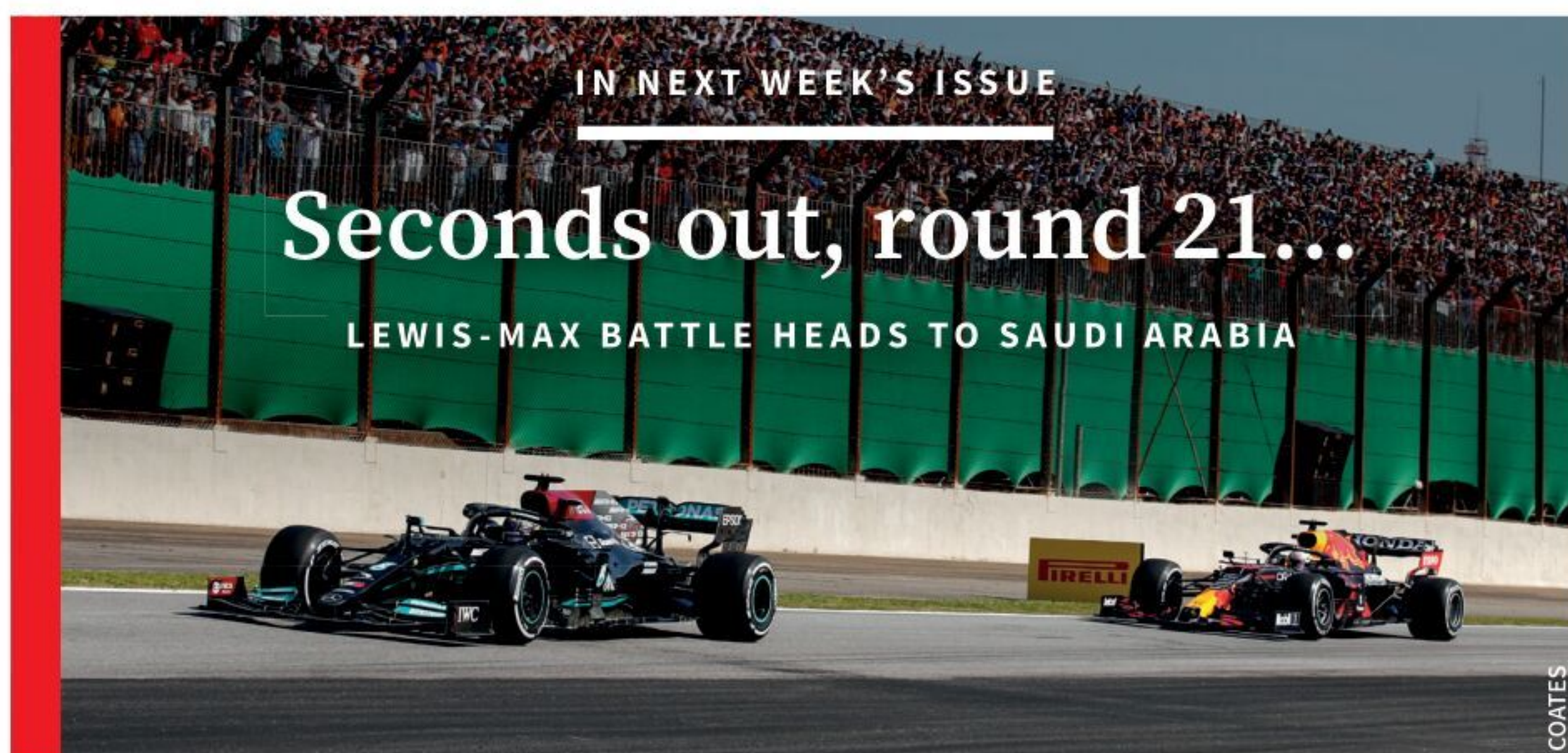
Matta. Wirdheim subsequently tested for Dale Coyne Racing at Sebring before series co-owner Kevin Kalkhoven (the K in PKV) helped to broker an HVM drive.

Keith Wiggins's team had won races under the Herdez Competition banner, but the withdrawal of its main sponsor and subsequent renaming to Hola Viva Mexico! did little to help its cashflow. Combined with another rookie teammate, Ronnie Bremer, it couldn't have been less comparable to the 1999 Ganassi and 2003 Newman-Haas squads in which Montoya and Bourdais had started out. Doing all of his learning on race weekends – "We kept going from race to race fighting the same problems" – Wirdheim believes made for "an impossible task".

His best showing, sixth on the Las Vegas oval, was also his final outing, but the result only tells part of the story. A podium was on without a slow pitstop caused by a crew member forgetting to turn on the jacks' compressed air system.

"That was really hard to swallow," says Wirdheim, who then headed for Japan. "I knew that I likely wasn't going to be able to finish the season, so I did everything in my power to make sure that they kept me on. It was just absolutely frustrating."

JAMES NEWBOLD



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